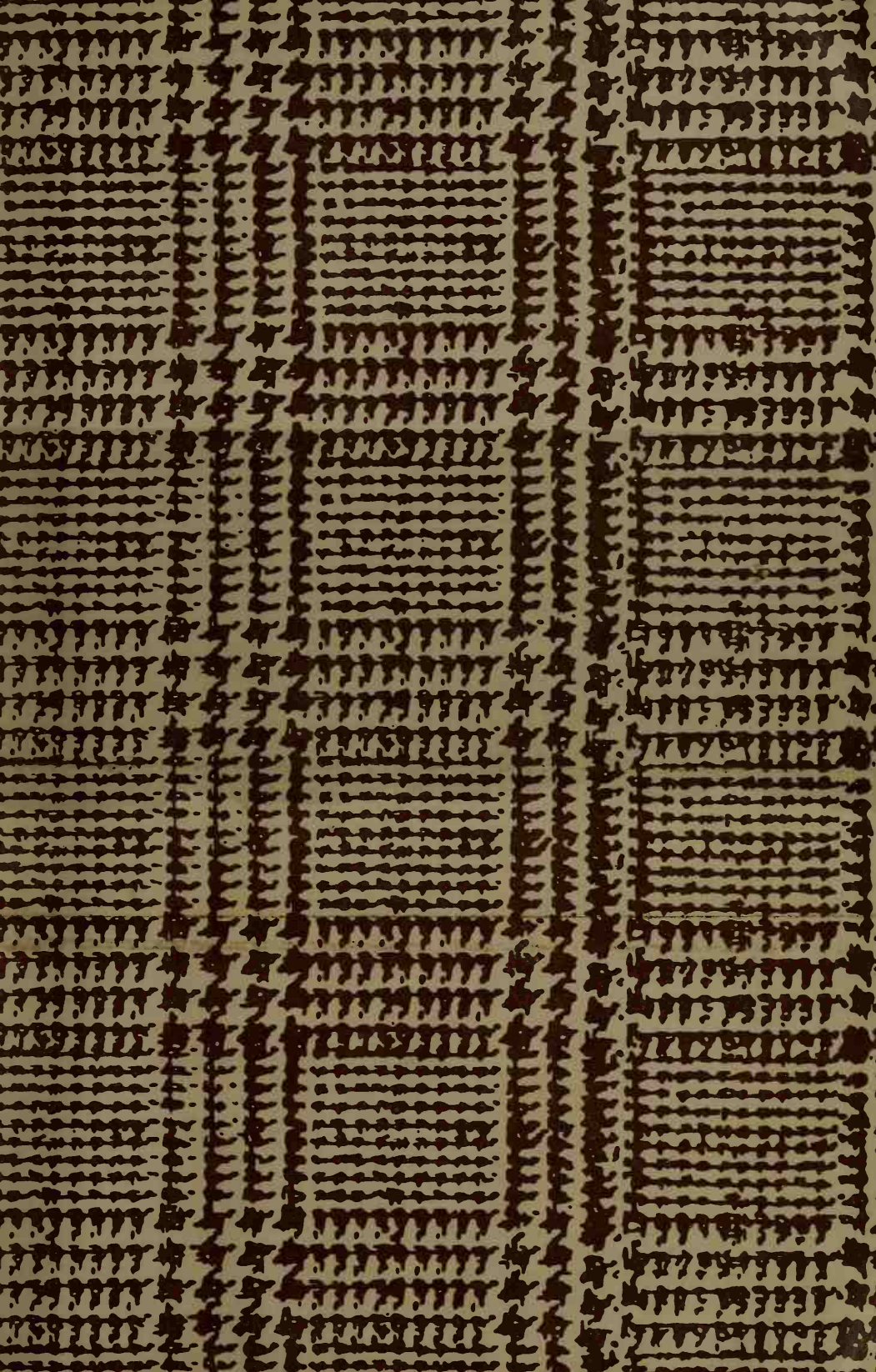

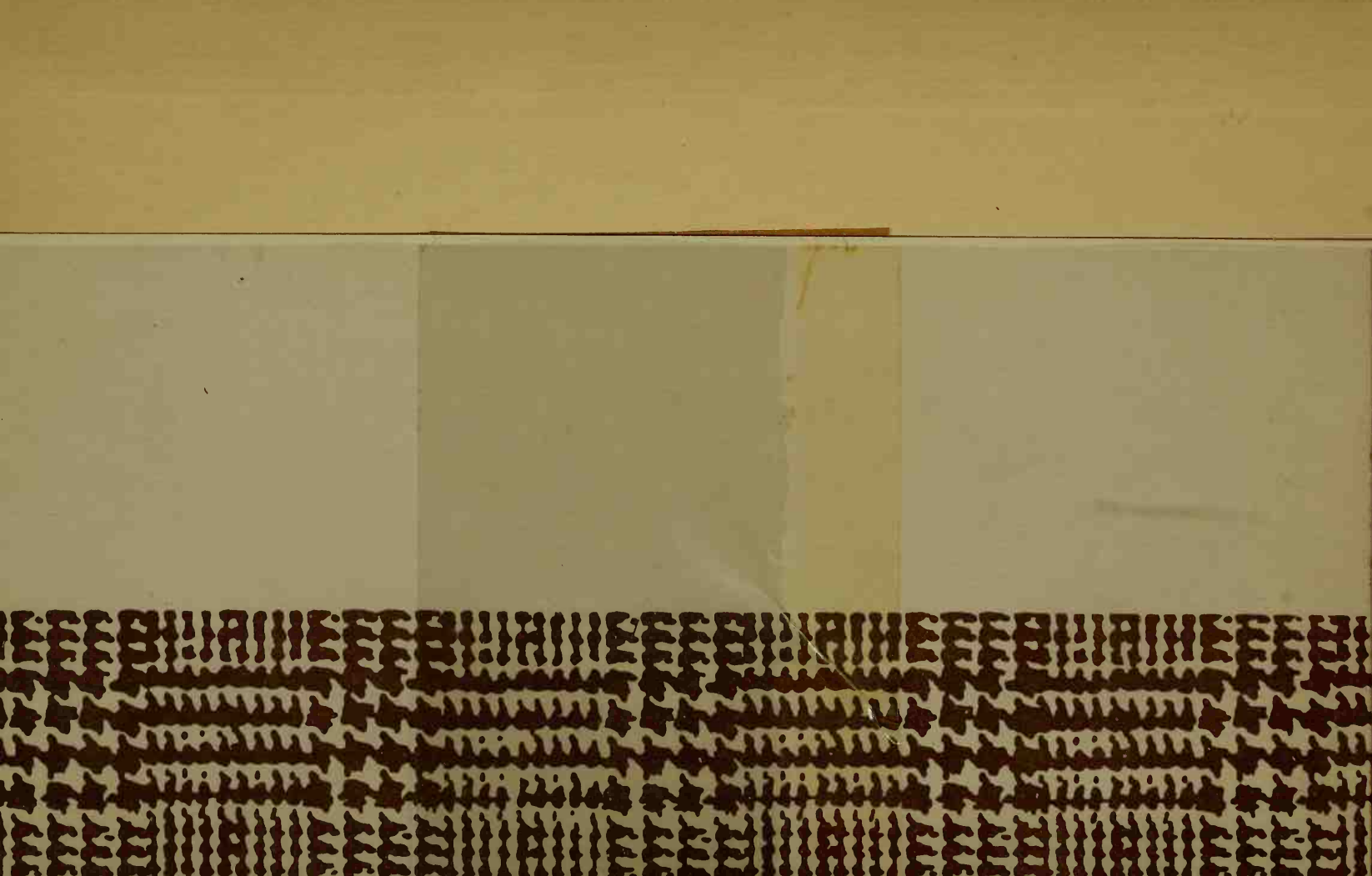

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THE TAPESTRY

THE TAPESTRY

BY

J. D. BERESFORD

Author of Love's Pilgrim, Unity
The Monkey Puzzle
Almost Pagan, Etc.

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THE TAPESTRY

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CHAPTER I

THE TAPESTRY—I

HIS first memories of the tapestry were entirely associated with the frame. It represented one of his first clear recognitions of taboo, and the ecstasies of temptation that any taboo can arouse. There were big wooden disks like immense buttons on the frame of the tapestry, and when you turned them round they moved up or down on the sticks that went through their middles. Sometimes, when important developments of the work were in progress, these disks were separated from the cross-bar on which the tapestry was rolled, and could be screwed up and down, or even taken right off, in the most exciting way. At other times they could only be turned in one direction, and when that was done there were strange creakings, which meant that if Aunt Lizzie came in, you had once more committed the unforgivable sin; but, if it were Aunt Caroline, merely an excusable misdemeanor.

Between these two extremes were the reproofs of mother and father. With the latter you never knew. If the wickedness were reported to him by Aunt Lizzie up-stairs, he might be terrifying, frown horribly, shout

and even shake you. Fortunately, those explosions were soon escaped from, because as soon as he said "Mother of God," as he was sure to quite early, Aunt Lizzie took you out of the room again, shook you herself, not very hard, on the landing, and said it wasn't surprising you should be so wicked, though that was no excuse. But if father came in and found you at it, he might just whistle and say *"Défendu,* my son," as if it were a joke; or, if he had that worried air of looking for something, and noticed your effect of being caught in the act, he might say: "You're only out for trouble, you little fool. What on earth you want to do it *for,* I can't think. For heaven's sake leave the dashed thing *alone."*

Mother always said practically the same thing: "How often have you been told not to play with aunt's tapestry, Johnny? You *must* learn to do what you're told. Now you must stand in the corner till you say you're sorry." It was as well to give the corner a few minutes before you said it, even if you were quite prepared to be sorry at once; otherwise you might be kept there for a timed quarter of an hour, or even longer if mother's watch stopped, as it so often did when she took it out of her belt and forgot to shake it before she put it back.

Later, the unforgivable sin or trivial misdemeanor of unscrewing the stretcher of the aunts' tapestry came to be ranged with a host of similar taboos. They nearly all rose from certain prime assumptions. To begin with, they were not sins in themselves. When you were strong enough, for instance, to screw the frame up

again without any one knowing, nothing happened except that you still felt a queer sense of guilt. The sin, it seemed, lay in doing something you had been told not to do. That was clearly defined as disobedience, which, as Aunt Lizzie frequently pointed out, was the first sin mentioned in the Bible and the root of all others. And since being disobedient meant very often being a nuisance to other people, that fault was fairly comprehensible though it had other aspects, such as forgetting to say your prayers, which could not have been a nuisance to any one, except perhaps to God. God, Johnny decided quite early in life, was very like Aunt Lizzie. That affair of the Garden of Eden and putting one sort of apple that Adam must not eat had the authentic Aunt Lizzie touch. She, too, would set traps for perfectly good little boys. For instance, she had once left an open box of presumably uncounted chocolates on the table with instructions not to touch them. He had heard her footsteps go along the passage toward the kitchen, and had really intended only to *look* at the chocolates, but the temptation had been too strong. And Aunt Lizzie had not really gone into the kitchen at all, but had come back very quietly and watched him through the crack of the door.

He had greatly resented that trick and had told his mother about it at bedtime, when he learned that the explanation of Aunt Lizzie's behavior and God's was to teach him self-control. Mother, indeed, appeared to believe that that was what all temptations were for. What still puzzled him, nevertheless, was that if God knew everything, even things that were going to happen

ahead, He should have bothered to set that trap for Adam, whom He had previously created specially to fall into it. Possibly, as mother said, he was not old enough yet to understand, but it certainly seemed to him that God and Aunt Lizzie were very much alike in some ways.

The tapestry itself did not begin to interest him until he was much older. It was taken out less and less often as he grew up. Aunt Caroline's eyes were beginning to fail her in those days, and for the most part the tapestry, rolled up on its frame, was just a familiar, unnoticeable object in its usual place against the wall in the drawing-room; tucked away behind the round table that more than filled the corner between the fireplace and the beginning of the bow-window.

Even on those increasingly rare occasions when he found the aunts actually working on it, there was little to be seen, as only a few inches were exposed at a time; and even on her best days Aunt Lizzie was not to be persuaded into performing the complicated operation of releasing the rollers in order to display the work already done for the benefit of a small boy of nine or ten, or—the last time he ever asked her—of fourteen. But if he could not see the work itself, as a whole, he knew the subject from the pattern, which was a tremendous roll of printed paper in many colors, ruled all over with tiny squares.

This pattern also was a sacred object and not on any account to be played with by little boys, but Aunt Caroline had showed it to him, rolling it out with some difficulty on the carpet, and keeping it from springing together again by weighting the corners with books.

This was not an ideal position for obtaining a good general view of the design, but he was able to get the effect of the subject which was the fight of Joshua with the Amorites. Joshua himself, in armor, riding a clumsy-looking but obviously spirited horse, was well in the foreground, pointing at the sky with a short sword. In front of him there were some complicated bushes and grasses in dark browns and greens, with two dogs, and in the corner what Aunt Caroline explained was a crouching hare; but the bottom of the pattern was too much torn to distinguish it. Beyond and behind Joshua were the armies of Israel and of the allied kings, fighting in a dip of the ground, with the city of Gibeon away to the right; and the background above the horizon, which was mountainous and began about the level of the horse's ears, was composed of an exceedingly busy sky, beginning with some tremendous clouds which were sharply illuminated from above by the visible rays of the obedient sun waiting for Joshua's permission to move on again; with finally a vision of God and the holy angels, all in pale yellows, right at the top of everything.

When it was finished, this remarkable tapestry was to be made into a screen; but when Johnny first saw the complete pattern at the age of nine, the actual work had not nearly reached the horizon; and although, as Aunt Caroline explained, much of the difficult work in the foreground and in the fine detail of the engaged armies, was done, it seemed unlikely, Johnny thought, that at this present rate of progress the aunts would ever get up to God.

He was nearly thirteen, though Joshua still stopped

short at the waist, when the memory of some elementary lessons in astronomy at school initiated a new problem for him, one bright morning near the end of the summer holidays, after they had all come back from Brighton. The aunts, cheered by the sunlight and invigorated no doubt by their month at the seaside, were hard at work: Aunt Lizzie doing a piece of Joshua's belt, and Aunt Caroline, with her strongest glasses on, peering into and pulling over the tangle of many colored wools in the basket.

Johnny had wandered in casually and was trying to be as little as possible in the way while he watched the almost invisible progress of the work, when the contradiction suddenly occurred to him.

"But," he broke out, unable to contain his astonishing discovery, "the sun doesn't really go round the earth; it only looks as if it does. What happens is that the earth turns round, and so——"

"Nonsense," replied Aunt Lizzie on general principles.

"But Mr. Waterson told us," he remonstrated.

"I can't help Mr. Waterson's troubles," Aunt Lizzie said.

Johnny thought that over for a minute or so before he tried:

"Do you mean, Aunt Lizzie, that he's wrong and that the sun does go round the earth after all?"

"I've never bothered my head about it, nor need little boys," was Aunt Lizzie's response. "What's far more important is that you should do as you're told and thank God for all His blessings without asking how He

sends them. If you've nothing to do why don't you get a good book and read?"

There was no hope there, and Aunt Caroline, though he had a suspicion that something might be got from her on this subject, if she were alone, never contradicted Aunt Lizzie to her face. But as luck would have it, he found papa in a good mood after tea and propounded the difficulty to him.

"Getting on, aren't you?" papa said brightly. "Beginning to study *le dessous des cartes* already? Lord, boy, there'll be a jolly old *rixe* between you and Aunt Lizzie if you start these theological arguments."

Papa's mother had been French and he had been at school in France for two years. When new people came to call, he always explained to them that he was half French, rather as if it were an excuse for something.

"But, papa, it is true that the sun doesn't really go round the earth, isn't it?" Johnny asked again.

"*Cela soit dit entre nous,*" papa replied. "But the aunts, you know——" His expression and gesture conveyed that if the aunts preferred to retain their belief in the Ptolemaic system, they must not be interfered with.

"Then the Bible isn't really true?" Johnny persisted hopefully.

But papa gave no satisfying reply to that. He was standing on the hearth-rug with his hands under the skirts of his dressing-gown, just as if there were a fire, and all he did was to close his left eye and look very hard at Johnny with the other.

That was a well-known trick of papa's when he was in a good humor but had no mind to be badgered. Sometimes it was coupled with the advice, *"Pas besoin d'enfoncer une porte ouverte,"* and if that could be understood on the present occasion, it might be inferred that papa did not believe in the Bible either, but had no intention of committing himself to a statement.

The last resort was to mama at bedtime.

He approached the subject more warily with her. She was the only person to whom he ever chattered. She had a way of sitting very still and watching him that sometimes conveyed a kind of impression that she was trying very hard to do her best. It was, he felt vaguely, an attitude that lacked some quality of sympathy he instinctively craved; but it gave him a chance to say things he could not possibly say to any one else; and she was always carefully attentive.

He began on this occasion with the tapestry, asking her opinion as to what likelihood there was of its ever being finished; and having been told, as he anticipated, that so much depended on whether Aunt Caroline's eyes got better, he went on to discuss the miracle of Joshua. "You see, mama," he concluded, "Mr. Waterson says that the sun doesn't really go round the earth at all, so how could it stand still?"

"It only *seemed* to stand still, Johnny," mama explained.

"Then the earth must have stopped turning round?" he suggested, confusedly aware of further difficulties involving the moon which did go round the earth, and had also paused on the same occasion.

And possibly mama, too, had some sense of complications not unlike those that had taxed the old geometricians when they sought to account for the paths of the planets on the assumption that our earth was the stationary center of the great universe; for she hurried on to the single immense explanation that Johnny was never able to confute.

"So much of the Bible, dear," she said, "is only an *allegory*. It's not meant to be taken quite literally. Especially the Old Testament."

Even then Johnny had a sensation of helplessness at mama's statement; a sensation of being lost in a place of enormous distances and profundities; a place in which, as he had already learned, "things are not what they seem," and there are no facts but only an appearance to be variously interpreted according to the training and individual tendencies of the observer.

Not alone was the story of Joshua an allegory, but all religious teaching, even perhaps the solid earth itself, the host of the stars, one's own existence.

But an allegory of what?

CHAPTER II

FROM THE ANGLE OF THIRTEEN

PAPA was by way of being famous. He wrote music for songs. He had tried other more ambitious kinds, such as those for comic operas or burlesque, but that had not been a success. He attributed his failure to his Latin temperament; but Aunt Lizzie said it was a judgment on him for trying to get mixed up with the stage.

Long ago, before Johnny could remember, papa had had a great success with a song called *The Flood Tide*. People had gone on singing it for years, and it was sometimes hinted that the family were still living chiefly on the money it brought in. It was that song which had brought them to live in St. Edmund's Terrace, and papa always assigned anything that had happened before that period to the time before the Flood. Before the "Flood" Johnny gathered, papa and mama had been very poor and had had no friends. Even the aunts had not lived with them, then.

Mama wrote, but not in the admirable public way in which papa composed music. When papa had got what he called an "idea" for a song, he composed all over the house; drifting about in a kind of dream from room to room, making queer humming noises,

looking at you as if he didn't see you and tapping with his fingers on any piece of furniture that chanced to be handy. If you spoke to him, he scowled and went away at once without replying. After that, if the idea blossomed, you heard bits of it on the piano, and every one who called was consulted about it. "What do you think of this?" papa would say. "I haven't got it quite right yet, but tell me how it strikes you. Hm? Do you find it—catching?" Certainly the bits one heard on the piano when the idea was still in the embryo were very catching indeed, and terribly hard to get out of your head, but for some inexplicable reason none of them caught the public as *The Flood Tide* had done.

Mama's writing was quite different. She did it shut up in her own bedroom, and no one was ever consulted about it. Also, until she, too, had what papa called her "Flood," no result was ever visible in the form of a book, though papa's songs were all over the house with his name, "Albert Fortescue" in large print on the outside. Even when mama's "Flood" came with a book called *Second Thoughts,* the name of the author was given as "Mary Gordon." It almost seemed as if until then she had been, in some way, ashamed of her writing. But *Second Thoughts,* with all the extraordinary changes it brought into Johnny's life, did not come until he was fifteen.

In his younger days he was not a very inquisitive little boy. He had the usual curiosities about the causes of natural phenomena: how trees grew; why the cat had kittens and the gas went "plop" when it was lighted; which was the biggest city in the world, things

of that kind, the answers to all of which he presumed were known to grown-up people—if not to any one in the house, certainly to the policeman in the Finchley Road, who was Johnny's first ideal of the Omniscient. But beyond these natural curiosities, he took things for granted. After he had learned that the earth was not the center of the universe, nor even of the solar system, he still continued to regard No. 33 St. Edmund's Terrace as the center of the earth. And it never occurred to him to inquire why the aunts lived with them; why Aunt Lizzie's surname was Fletcher instead of being Fortescue, like their own or Aunt Caroline's; why papa practically lived in a dressing-gown whose cord never remained tied for more than ten minutes together, although he invariably retied it whenever he entered the room; or why mama, who never scolded or neglected her little son, did not really love him as much as she loved Dido, her big gray Angora cat. (Before he went to school, he was jealous of Dido; and Dido, who had good reason to be aware of the fact, preferred never to be left in a room alone with him.)

All these things, and a hundred others of the same kind, he accepted as being typical of the general establishment of the world. There were other conditions: the Queen, on the one hand, lived quite differently as, on the other hand, did some of the people in Camden Town; but so far as he was able to formulate the idea of an average typical ménage, he regarded St. Edmund's Terrace as the just exemplar of all that was normal and regular. It did not, for instance, differ in important essentials from that of the Mallorys', in St.

James's Terrace. Papa Mallory was an artist, and painted pictures instead of writing songs; he had four children instead of only one, had no visible aunts and more money. But the standard of living and the opinions expressed were much the same there as at home, and Teddy, the Mallorys' second child and only son, was nearly the same age as Johnny. They went together to St. Paul's School after they were ten years old, which was how the Mallorys and the Fortescues first came to know one another.

Before that, Johnny had been taught by Aunt Lizzie, receiving the kind of education that naturally inclines a small boy to accept the present state of things as not only established, but inevitable. It is true that conditions, according to Aunt Lizzie, had once been much better, the ideal state of Society having been left behind in the earlier years of Queen Victoria, possibly with the death of Albert the Good, some eight years before Johnny was born. But this was only history, and though Aunt Lizzie might wonder what the world was coming to, there was the best possible reason to suppose that it would continue to exist until such time as God destroyed it by fire. (When Johnny was nine years old, he had some very uneasy moments as a consequence of Mother Shipton's prophecy that the world would come to an end in 1881—only three years ahead! He had, however, forgotten all about it by the time the fateful year actually arrived.) The general, unquestionable principle remained, everything that mattered—such as the laws of morality and conduct, the doctrines of the Last Judgment and Eternal Punishment, and, to put it

briefly, the duties to God and one's neighbor listed in the Church Catechism—had been finally settled and agreed upon, and if you did not believe them you went to hell. Lots and lots of people were going there, and there were moments when Johnny had a suspicion that Aunt Lizzie was inclined to include papa, himself, among the number.

It was after Johnny's accidental shift from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system that his curiosities about the constitution of society in St. Edmund's Terrace first began to awaken. The process began with his doubt of Aunt Lizzie's omniscience in the matters already set out. That she was practically omnipresent in the little kingdom of their home he could not deny, since she had the god-like gift of turning up whenever you happened to have done one of those things you ought not to have done. But if Aunt Lizzie really believed that the sun moved round the earth in face of the opinion of Mr. Waterson, mama, and (possibly) papa as well, was not one justified in having one's doubts about her teaching in general?

Those reflections engaged Johnny's attention as no other abstraction had ever done. He sometimes pondered the subject for as much as two or three minutes at a time. And when he awoke in the early morning, he had a strange and delightful sense of being free, almost as if some dreadful threat of being condemned for life to imprisonment and servitude—with hell, as likely as not, at the end of it after all—had been blessedly, almost magically, removed. Now he had something to look forward to; something that had the entrancing

quality of being mysterious and unknown in place of a dreary prospect of for ever doing his uninteresting duty in that state of life to which it should please God to call him, with a reward—at the best—of going to a heaven that promised nothing more than a perpetual attendance upon and praise of some One who, he could not help believing, must be uncommonly like Aunt Lizzie in some ways. In any case, Aunt Lizzie, herself, was sure to be there.

After that, he did his Scripture lesson on Sunday morning—the only lesson he still had from Aunt Lizzie after he went to St. Paul's—with the comfortable feeling that her teaching and the Bible's were not strictly true, only an allegory.

There was certainly one or two little drawbacks to set off against this great gift of liberty to enter an unknown world. One was an occasional sense of loneliness and of being in some way terribly responsible and exposed. Instead of a plain rule of life, with everything you had to do as clearly set down as it was on the school time-table, with, in addition, the possibility that God would give you anything you asked for if it happened to be good for you; a point you could not judge for yourself—you had rather to take your chance with any difficulties that might turn up, having the terrifying uncertainty before you that you were as likely as not to do the wrong thing. The only way that Johnny saw out of that trouble was to take a sporting chance on the Bible and the Catechism being somewhere near right after all. When in doubt it might be better to stick to the Ten Commandments and your Duty to

God and your neighbor. If you did that you could not, he thought, go very far wrong.

Another drawback was that he lost his delight in being Joshua. Before the realization of all that Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo had done for the world came home to him, he had found playing at Joshua an admirable comfort when he was in bed, and the furniture, the water-pipes or the mice in the attics overhead made weird noises in the dead of night. At such times he had ridden his thick-legged but spirited horse, strong in the knowledge that he had power even to command the movements of the sun and moon. He became in that fantasy immensely powerful, and all the world, but more particularly the engaged armies in the valley of Gibeon, regarded him with awe. At that point he usually fell asleep again, so his immediate object was attained; and he was not faced, as he had been when playing Joshua by day, with a climax that could neither be surpassed nor sustained. For to remain sitting on a horse, pointing with a sword and being regarded with awe, became, Johnny found, a terrible bore after about a minute. You wanted to *do* something; you wanted other worlds to conquer.

But after he changed his mind about the movements of the celestial bodies, the Joshua game fell altogether into disuse, because he could no longer convincingly command the sun to stand still. Do what he would, even to the point of "letting it happen for this once," that the sun was at his old unscientific trick of going round the earth, the virtue had gone out of the fantasy; and in the middle of it he would find himself speculat-

ing vaguely as to what the moon would do if you stopped the earth going round, because the moon had what Mr. Waterson called a "proper" movement of its own, the opposite of which was not, as you might suppose "improper," but "apparent." . . . And in the middle of these curious speculations he would become suddenly very wide awake to the consciousness of a noise that it was very hard to attribute to mice, furniture or water-pipes. Papa going to bed, perhaps?

It was then, as a consequence of this awakening to unknown possibilities in the world at large, that he began to apply the principle of inquiry to the hitherto quietly accepted phenomena of St. Edmund's Terrace, a process that led him to one interesting and corroborative discovery. He was pricked on in this instance by what papa called a *"rixe,"* the origin of which Johnny never discovered.

The affair presented itself to him in the first place as a considerable noise in the drawing-room, so considerable that nobody seemed to have heard him come back from school. He was almost on the first floor when the drawing-room door opened, and Aunt Lizzie came out with that sort of expression on her face that she sometimes wore in church; rather as if she were being Joshua and commanding everything and everybody to stand still. She took no notice of Johnny and went straight up to her own room, so he rather timidly entered the drawing-room.

Papa, with his dressing-gown very much untied, was gesticulating by the window, while mama, sitting very still, with her hands in her lap, and her head slightly

bent, looked as though she were weathering a storm and would not be sorry when it was over.

When Johnny came in, papa glanced in his direction with the unseeing air he wore when an "idea" for a song was coming to him, and then said viciously, just as if he and mama were quite alone: "I tell you, Minnie, that I've had more than enough of that damned woman." (It was one of papa's little eccentricities that he never spoke French when he was excited, nor when he was interested in anything—perhaps he forgot!)

Mama screwed her mouth a little tighter, and shrugged her shoulders; an answer that, curiously enough, appeared to be terribly convincing, for papa made a gesture of despair, retied the cord of his dressing-gown and began to pace up and down the room, muttering: "This infernal poverty; this cursed, infernal poverty."

At that point, mama signed to Johnny to leave the room, but he had heard enough to set him wondering what the connection could be between that "damned woman"—almost certainly another and rather a good name for Aunt Lizzie—and this cursed poverty? There had been a distinct implication that you had to choose between those two evils.

He puzzled over it for twenty-four hours and then asked mama.

"There is no reason you shouldn't know," she said quietly. "Aunt Lizzie isn't your real aunt, you see; in fact she's no relation at all, only an old friend of Aunt Caroline. And she—well, she helps to pay part of the expenses of the house."

"There's no hope of her ever going away, then?" Johnny inquired.

Mama did not reprove him for the form of his question, but her answer implied that she herself might have put it differently.

"There are many good reasons," she said, "why it is better for Aunt Lizzie to stay with us; things you won't be able to understand until you're a little older."

Johnny, knowing the hopelessness of pursuing any inquiry in face of that answer, took another line. "But Aunt Caroline's a real aunt, isn't she?"

"A half-aunt," mama explained; "because she's only papa's half-sister. Your grandpapa, papa's papa, you know, was married twice, so Aunt Caroline and papa had the same father but not the same mother."

There were some rather curious and interesting problems connected with that answer which Johnny would have liked to explore further, but mama gave him no chance, continuing rather hurriedly: "Aunt Caroline's mama was not French, you know, and she's more than twenty years older than papa. Now, it's quite time you settled down and went to sleep."

Johnny had no need for any recourse to the new version of the Joshua fantasy that night. At first he was rather intrigued with that queer mother and father business. Why was anybody particular your very own papa? Was it because he lived in the same house with one's mama, or was it that he paid the doctor to bring you in the first instance? No, there must be something more than that in it, because when Dido had had kittens the last time, Johnny had heard papa say that he

thought he could give a pretty good guess as to who their father was; and in that case there had been no doctor, and cats did not pay money for things. Teddy Mallory was sure, too, that there was some mystery about it.

From that his thoughts strayed to the other mystery that he had not recognized as such until he had received the explanation. Why had it never occurred to him to wonder that Aunt Lizzie's name should be Fletcher, that Aunt Caroline never boasted of her mother having been French, as papa did; and that she should have been so much older? He had a feeling that he ought to have guessed there was something; he felt as if he had missed an opportunity to be clever. Was there perhaps anything else rather mysterious about their household; something he ought to be able to guess about mama and papa, for instance? He tried to be very clever and find something—without the least success—the only thing he could think of was mama's writing, but that led nowhere. No, papa and mama were—just ordinary, he decided.

And then, just as he was falling asleep, a brilliant deduction came to him that he had until that moment completely overlooked. Aunt Lizzie was not a real aunt, and it was therefore quite probable that God was not a real god; only some one who taught little boys while they were too young to understand—things like having fathers and mothers—and from whom you would presently get away altogether.

That damned woman and God were a sort of allegory, which meant, he had carefully learned, though it

was a little difficult to understand at first: "A fiction presented to the mind in such a manner as to awaken the thought of another object."

But what was the other object in this case?

He went to sleep before he had settled that important point.

CHAPTER III

THE CLUMPING AGE

HE was fifteen and growing out of "Johnny" into "John" when the first intimations of a great change of fortune began to loom ahead.

Teddy Mallory was partly responsible for the alteration of his name. Teddy had a habit of speaking of almost any male individual as a "Johnny," and it was as well to be distinguished from a genus that contained such doubtfully admirable species as a "rum old Johnny" or "no end of a queer Johnny." Teddy, who had himself ambitions toward being called "Edward," was quite agreeable to help him, and after some little trouble in fighting the inertia of long custom, "John" was taken up at home by every one except the aunts, who didn't matter very much.

By that time the influence of the aging century, St. Paul's and Teddy had worked together to produce another change of nomenclature, and papa and mama had definitely given place to pater and mater. Also they had changed more than their names in those two years. John no longer regarded them as the typical parents seen by Johnny. Observation of the Mallorys had shown him, for instance, that the average father did not go about, sometimes the whole day long, in a dressing-

gown that had no buttons and a cord that never remained tied for more than two minutes together; did not show off his French and pretend to apologize for doing it by pleading a French mother; did not wear whiskers and speak of them as *"favoris"*; and, conclusively, did not always address his son as if he were either a criminal or some kind of half-wit to be patronized, or played the fool with.

By way of balance, the mater's transfiguration was of another kind. As papa had come down from Olympus, she had ascended. She no longer came into his room after he was in bed, and their good-night kiss had grown very perfunctory. Shyly and furtively he had considered the suggestion that the mater was very good-looking, a fact that for some reason made him rather afraid of her. In awkward clumsy ways, he tried to please her; going to fetch things for her, or passing the butter and the marmalade at breakfast before she asked for them. Generally he blushed when offering these services, but he blushed a good deal at that time. And there could be no doubt that the mater always looked well dressed. You never saw *her* in a dressing-gown.

John received the first hint of coming glories one evening at supper toward the end of October. The pater, properly dressed and in a particularly good humor, was being even more French than usual, and at last, Aunt Lizzie, looking very stiff, asked him very coldly if he would mind expressing himself in a decent language.

"Mais il n'y en a pas de plus propre que la belle langue française, ma chère Lizzie," was the reply; an

astonishing one, John thought, because the pater seemed to be rather afraid of Aunt Lizzie, and, when reproved by her, generally shut up and sulked.

"I simply don't understand you," Aunt Lizzie said.

"I only remarked," the pater explained, winking wickedly and openly at the mater, "that a knowledge of the French language is essential to a polite education."

"I don't agree with you," Aunt Lizzie snapped.

"And," the pater continued, "as it seems to be almost on the cards that we may be able to visit that adorable country again before long, it'll be as well for us to get into practise."

Aunt Lizzie shrugged her shoulders.

"Go to France, do you mean, pater?" John put in, and was answered in French again by the obvious proverb that you must never sell the skin of a bear before you have killed him.

It was the kind of answer that had begun to rile John. He was coming to realize that this talking in French was not done, certainly not by people like the Mallorys. Beyond that, it was annoying to be put off as if you were a kid of ten.

After supper he asked the mater what the pater had meant.

"There is a chance that we may go to France for a month or two after Christmas," she said.

"All of us?" he inquired.

"No, only the three of us," she returned.

John rubbed his hands. "Oh, I say, that *would* be jolly," he exclaimed.

The mater, for some reason or other, did not seem so sure of that. "It's quite uncertain yet," was all she said.

The next hint of the unexpected came from Teddy Mallory, two or three days later.

"I say, John," he said, "I've promised pater to ask you if it's true that your mater is really the author of *Second Thoughts,* that book every one's reading, you know?"

John had to confess that he knew no more than Teddy himself.

"She does write," he said. "But I've no idea what. She never talks about it."

"Well," Teddy explained, "a friend of pater's who writes books—Mr. Farjeon, expect you've heard of him —told us that his publisher published *Second Thoughts,* and told him that the real name of the author was Mrs. Fortescue, the wife of the composer."

John whistled. "I expect it's true," he said.

He sincerely hoped it was true, not because he then connected this piece of news with the possibility of their going to France without Aunt Lizzie, but because it would "sort of help" with the Mallorys.

The acquaintance between them and the Fortescues had not ripened. Occasional visits were exchanged and that was all, though John, himself, was continually in and out of the house in St. James's Terrace; and that house, and the Mallorys themselves, had come to stand to him for a model of how things should be done and people should behave and dress.

Mr. Mallory was, of course, Vincent Mallory, R.A.;

a splendid chap with a long, pointed brown beard, that had a sort of ripple in it. He was over six feet, too, nearly a head taller than the pater. Mrs. Mallory was a little-ish woman, nearly as good-looking as the mater, and very nice. And they knew all sorts of famous people quite intimately: Leighton, Millais, G. F. Watts, Charles Reade, and, although she did not come to St. James's Terrace now, Ellen Terry; clever people who, John was uneasily aware, would not have thought much of the pater.

But if this news about the book that "every one was reading" were true, it would in a way rather tend to level things up a bit.

He wasted no time in beating about the bush when he went home, but ran straight up to the drawing-room without wiping his boots.

"I say, mater," he demanded, "Teddy says you wrote *Second Thoughts*. Did you?"

"Good God, look at his boots!" commented the pater, before she had time to reply.

"Oh, bother! I forgot," John said, frowning. "Did you though, mater?"

She nodded, casually, not as if she were a bit proud of having written so remarkable a book, and added, with a look at John's boots: "Better take them off at once, hadn't you?"

The pater, standing in his favorite position on the hearth-rug, with his dressing-gown wide open, nodded, and then, looking at John who was already a little taller than himself, said: "He has reached the clumping age, I'm afraid."

John intensely resented that remark; it made him feel clumsy and awkward, and somehow ashamed before the mater, but he did not dare any adequate retort such as that which flitted through his mind to the effect that anyhow he did not go about half-dressed all day. His criticism of his father, although it was approaching a violent and intolerant stage, was tinged with an innate sense of duty and of fear. He could not have said why he should be afraid to "cheek" him. What could the pater have done? Nevertheless, though John often defied that authority in imagination, he was, in fact, daunted by it.

That horrible description of himself as having reached the clumping age came back to him many times in the course of the next few weeks, and if the primary effect of the insult was to stir anew the resentment against his father, it also influenced him to "clump" less than he had hitherto done, though the exercise of restraint often went against the grain. He could not say why, but "clumping" gave him a sense of manliness and freedom; as did, also, the new gruffer sounds that were coming into his voice.

The full import of all that the mater had done in writing *Second Thoughts* dawned upon him by degrees. In the period immediately following his discovery of her authorship, he was consulted more than once by the pater, who was a perfect fool at arithmetic, on the calculation of percentages. "What's twelve and a half per cent. on fifteen hundred pounds, John?" was the first of these questions, put to him at a moment when he and the pater chanced to be alone for a min-

ute or two, and John, who did not see why he should do the pater's sums for him, replied: "Oh, multiply the rate per cent. and knock off two noughts. It's easy enough."

"Well, well, what do you make it?" the pater exclaimed testily. "I'm no sort of good at mental arithmetic." But before John had time to reply, the mater came into the room and the pater instantly changed the subject. John did not go on with the sum. Why should he? Quite likely there was some rotten "catch" in it.

That explanation, however, was shown to be a mistaken one, as the calculation was brought up again next day, and the answer, given this time, of a hundred and eighty-seven pounds ten shillings, was received without criticism, if it did not appear altogether satisfactory.

After that, when the percentage mounted to fifteen, and the capital sum to six, nine, twelve thousand pounds, John began to have a suspicion that these sums were in some way connected with the mater's book and the amount she would make out of it. The pater was so obviously excited by the answers he received, straddling the hearth-rug, cocking up the skirts of his dressing-gown with such a jaunty air, and humming softly as if a new and unprecedented idea had come to him; something that would make the "Flood" seem a very small inundation.

John tried sounding the mater on the subject, but she frowned and would not give him a direct answer. For some reason she did not appear to be frightfully pleased about it. "In any case, at the present moment,

we've got no more money to spend than we've always had," was the only definite information he received.

It was not until the first week in December that he got a truer indication of all that was involved. The fuss began at supper by the pater—who confined himself almost exclusively to the English language throughout—saying, as if he were renewing an old argument: "Well, all I can say is, why we should stay in this beastly climate, when we might be basking in the sunshine, is clean beyond me."

"The English climate," Aunt Lizzie replied very deliberately, "is, I believe, the healthiest in the world."

"Stuff and nonsense," the pater returned contemptuously. He seemed to have lost nearly all his fear of Aunt Lizzie recently.

Aunt Lizzie smiled slightly, shrugged her shoulders, and went on eating with an effect of cold determination.

"Absolutely damned rot, my dear Lizzie," the pater continued viciously.

Aunt Lizzie bent her head over her plate as she said in a very distinct voice: "Gratitude I have never looked for, but I never expected to be sworn at in public."

"That silly twaddle about the infernal English climate annoys me," the pater grumbled.

"Other people have cause for annoyance also," was the answer he received, "but they do not use profane language on that account."

"Well, I do, that's all the difference," the pater said.

John felt a little sorry for Aunt Lizzie. She had not been so bad the last few months.

And then the mater said: "I don't think we'll continue this discussion. In any case, Albert, we haven't any money at present."

"Lord, Minnie, whose fault is that?" the pater inquired. "You can get it whenever you like out of old Pilkington. I'll wager he'd make no fuss about letting you have a thousand pounds on the nail if you asked him."

"I don't care to ask him," the mater replied.

"Well, *I* don't mind," the pater went on. "I'll go like a shot. It's quite the usual thing. I used to get advances against my royalties for *The Flood*. Done it heaps of times. Why not let me go?"

The mater's answer was to screw up her eyes, shake her head, and give a glance at the attentive John. He knew very well what that meant; no more was to be said while he was there, but he had heard quite enough to guess what it was all about.

And, by golly, a thousand pounds! It seemed an enormous, an almost incredible sum of money; but the pater had said old Pilkington would let them have it like a shot. Old Pilkington was the mater's publisher.

He thought about it at intervals all the next day, and hoped that some further information might transpire in the course of supper, but there was hardly any conversation at table that evening, and what there was had no bearing, so far as he could see, on the overwhelmingly important topic. The pater had apparently been out that afternoon, as he was properly dressed, but he was in a very quiet mood, and John was unable to draw any inferences from his behavior.

After supper he stayed down in the dining-room as usual to do his home-work, but about eight o'clock the mater happened to come in to look for something, and he seized the opportunity to make a direct inquiry.

"I say, mater," he began.

She was rummaging in a drawer of the chiffonier with her back to him, but she turned round when he spoke and gave him her attention.

"Well?" she said.

"I say, mater, was it true what the pater said last night?" he continued boldly. "That Mr. Pilkington, I mean, would let you have a thousand pounds at any time if you wanted it?"

She nodded without moving.

"But—but don't you want to have it?" he asked.

She came across the room and sat down opposite to him at the dining-room table. Then looking at him very earnestly, she said: "I don't know, John; I don't know."

He was puzzled, and yet in a way rather excited. He felt that she was treating him for the first time as if he were something more than a mere kid, and he wanted to respond worthily.

"Seems a bit rum to me, of course," he said seriously.

"Only that? Nothing else?" she asked.

He tried to think of some other important thing in their lives that might be classified as "rum," but the only other instance of violent eccentricity that occurred to him was the pater's dressing-gown.

"Well, I dunno, not particularly, unless it's the way pater goes about?" he ventured.

"What do you mean by that?" she said.

"Always in his dressing-gown and so on, you know," he replied.

She seemed suddenly to lose her interest in him when he said that. She sighed and looked down at the table-cloth. "You'd like to go to France, I suppose?" she remarked carelessly.

"Rather," he said.

"Why?"

He could find half a dozen reasons, but he had an intuition that most of them would sound "kiddish" to her. "I'd like to see the Mediterranean awfully," he tried, and then added more spontaneously, "Besides, getting away from Aunt Lizzie."

She raised her eyes, looking at him rather queerly, he thought. "But Aunt Lizzie is so good for us," she said dryly. "I don't know what we should have done without her all these years. However," she stood up as she spoke and sighed again, "I think you'll get your wish. Your father saw Mr. Pilkington this afternoon, it seems. I guessed it when he came in. And you and I and he will probably go to Nice about the middle of January. Oh! well . . ."

She paused there with an effect of having something more to say, and John waited for her to speak again. She had momentarily quenched his delight in gaping at the wonderful prospect in front of him. He could not understand what she was afraid of, nor in what way Aunt Lizzie had been so "good for them all those years." But, at last, as she still stood there, apparently forgetful of his presence, looking straight out before

her as if her thoughts were very far away, he said timidly:

"Would you sooner not go to Nice, then, mater?"

She pursed her mouth, but her eyes were smiling as she concluded the conversation by repeating her opening phrase. "I don't know, John; I don't know."

For some time after she had gone, he remained perplexed and a little wistful. Why was he so slow to guess what was going on? It had never occurred to him at supper that the pater had been to see old Pilkington, but the mater had jumped to it at once. And now, ought he not to be able to guess why she did not seem keen on the trip to Nice? He tried for a minute or two, but nothing came to him except a few wild shots that did not fit the facts.

He gave it up with the excuse that he did not know enough, and then allowed his thoughts to return to the exciting prospect of spring on the Riviera. Nice, he knew, was quite near that extraordinarily romantic place, Monte Carlo, where the most exciting things happened. Mr. Mallory had been there. . . .

He saw more than ever of the Mallorys that Christmas. The mater's celebrity, now openly acknowledged, seemed to have bridged the invisible gulf that divided them from his own people. John was glad of that. It helped to relieve him from the uncomfortable sense that in some way he was not quite the Mallorys' equal.

He had, nevertheless, some very uncomfortable moments when the pater was there, with him, in St. James's Terrace. The pater behaved so funnily, or at least so differently from the Mallorys. Sometimes he

was too beastly polite, kissing Mrs. Mallory's hand, bowing, playing antics of that kind. At other times he was, John thought, rather rude, swaggering, talking about himself, or criticizing Mr. Mallory's pictures, which was rather cheek when you came to think of it.

John was always rather too conscious of his father's presence when he was in St. James's Terrace, and once, as they were going round there together, he essayed a mild remonstrance.

"I say, pater," he said. "I wish you wouldn't talk such a lot of French at the Mallorys'. I don't think they like it much."

"Hoop!" ejaculated his father. "When I want advice from you, my boy, I'll ask for it."

"Well, I jolly well know they don't like it," John grumbled.

"Got the Mallorys in your pocket, haven't you?" his father replied, and added: "Well, if you have it's nothing to get stuck up about. They're nothing so very great, *mon gars*. He's only a tuppeny British artist of the usual kind. I can tell you they don't think much of the Royal Academy in Paris."

"I don't know anything about that, of course," John protested. "But I know they're jolly nice people, and they're friends with all sorts of frightfully famous men and women."

"Like me and your mother, for instance," the pater replied with a grin that John thought was simply idiotic.

But he did not talk much French that day, all the same.

If John had a regret at the thought of leaving England, it was connected with the Mallorys. He wished that the whole family was coming to Nice, too. He liked them all. Mr. and Mrs. Mallory, naturally—who wouldn't? And then the eldest girl, Helen, who was nearly seventeen and was going to be a painter like her father. She had dark hair like Edward and was tall, taller than John. And the two youngest, who were both girls—just kids, of course. The youngest of all, Viva, was only ten yet, with a lot of brown hair that rippled like Mr. Mallory's beard, but she was frightfully pretty. Every one said so.

Quite an adorable family altogether, John thought, though he would not have dared that adjective in his speech. At fifteen he had but three superlatives.

He went, alone, to say good-by to the Mallorys on the eve of his departure for France. He expected to be home again in three months' time, and there was no need for any elaborate leave-taking, but it was an excuse to see them once more, and he had a confused object in his mind that he thought of as "saying good-by properly." He wanted to part with them, as it were, on a sort of top note; it may have been in order to leave with them a pleasant impression that should wipe out the memory of the pater's manners.

When Mr. Mallory, chaffing him, said that he would come back speaking French like his father, John said in his new gruff voice: "Oh no, rather not." He hoped that they would understand how completely he wished to disclaim admiration for any tricks of that kind.

The only thing that at all spoiled the parting effect

was the expression of Mrs. Mallory. She looked, he thought, as though she were rather sorry for him, an emotion quite out of place in that leave-taking. He saw himself so definitely as the hero, and more particularly, he did not know why, he wished Viva to think of him as a hero. Perhaps it was because she was only ten, and he had more chance of being regarded with an adoring admiration by her than by any of the others. She certainly seemed to like him rather. It was a pity that she was so very young.

CHAPTER IV

THE SETTING OUT

JOHN retained throughout his life many vivid impressions of the passage from London to Nice, an adventure different in kind from anything he had hitherto experienced.

It was a cold day toward the end of January, and London was trying to shelter itself from an intermittent blizzard that plastered vertical surfaces with a momentary blanket of wet snow, and set the streets running with brown slush. When the front door was opened to carry the luggage out to the private omnibus that had been ordered to take them to Victoria, the wind came right into the house, bellied up the dining-room carpet and made the fire smoke. Aunt Lizzie drew in her breath with a little hiss and set her teeth. John had been put in there to say good-by to her and Aunt Caroline, who was very nearly blind now and could not go out alone. The aunts seemed sorry that he was going, though their parting gift to him was only a Bible and a Prayer Book that he did not want. Aunt Lizzie had warned him several times that he was going to a Roman Catholic country—as if that mattered. But she was quite affectionate when she said good-by and told him she looked forward to having him back in the spring.

He wished afterward that he had responded less churlishly, but he was fidgeting for fear they might miss the train.

The sea looked pretty rough as they ran along the edge of the shore approaching Dover, and the mater, shivering in her furs, had evidently made up her mind that she was going to be sea-sick. John had qualms, too, but he pretended to make light of the crossing. "After all, it's only an hour and a half, mater," he said, trying to comfort her. The pater kept saying: "Oh, you'll be all right, Minnie, you'll be all right." He was, evidently, very excited and spoke scarcely any English.

It was certainly pretty beastly on the packet. The cutting wind and fine sleet made it almost impossible for most of the passengers to stay on deck, and they crowded down below and very soon a lot of them began to be sick. The boat rolled and pitched "like a bandbox," the pater said—and it was so frightful down below that after the first half-hour he thought they'd be better on deck in spite of the weather. But the mater would not move, and said that all she wanted was to be let alone. So John went up with his father and they found a comparatively sheltered place behind one of the deck-houses, where John was so excited in holding on that he wasn't sick after all. They were three-quarters of an hour late getting into Calais harbor, and the boat continued to roll a little even when it was alongside the quay. The mater was better when they got into the train, but she went straight to bed as soon as they arrived at the Paris hotel.

John did not see much of Paris. They were to have

stayed there for two or three days, but the morning after their arrival the sky was full of rain, and it was still very cold out-of-doors. The pater and mater did not come down until eleven o'clock, and John, who had also had his coffee and rolls up-stairs in the bedroom, did not know what to do with himself.

For a time he sat in the vestibule of the hotel, watched the people coming in and out, and tried to understand what they said. He understood a little here and there, but none of them seemed to speak French as clearly as the pater did. The women were easier to understand than the men, who spoke as though they had their mouths full. One chap who came in from the street, stamping his feet and blowing, said something about a *"vent glacial."* John got that all right.

But he did not stay there very long. He felt himself becoming conspicuous, and he was afraid some one might speak to him. He decided that if they did he would pretend not to understand. He blushed violently at the mere thought of trying to reply in French. Supposing some one asked him a question about the way to anywhere, for instance, what ought he to say? *"Je n'en sais rien, monsieur,"* or *"Pardon, m'sieur, je viens d'arriver à Paris pour la première fois,"* or *"Je regrette que je l'ignore."* They had all got rather an English sound, he thought, not like proper French. He'd jolly well have to learn French now. He had won the French prize at St. Paul's in the summer term, but that was quite different.

For a time he tried to read the journals in a little room off the hall, but a stout man with a big mustache

came in and stared at him so hard that John became uncomfortable and returned to the vestibule.

At eleven o'clock he went up-stairs and knocked at the door of his parents' room and was bidden to enter.

He found the pater in his familiar dressing-gown, standing by the *calorifère*. The window of the room faced the street and was streaming with rain.

"I say, what time do we have lunch?" John inquired. "I'm starving, aren't you?"

The mater was sitting at the looking-glass. She had her hair up, but was not dressed yet. She was quite a different shape in a *peignoir* and a petticoat, without a bustle or a waist or anything, and John felt shy of looking at her. It had never occurred to him before that women had not really got taper waists, sudden bulges on the hips and immense projections behind, when they were undressed. He did not want to think about it.

"Oh, twelve o'clock, I suppose," the pater said, and then continued as if an idea had come to him. "Look here, Minnie, why not go on to Marseilles this evening? One might as well be in London as here on a day like this. We'll do Paris in May on our way back."

"I'm quite agreeable," the mater said cheerfully.

"A la bonne heure," ejaculated the pater. *"Jean, mon petit, va chercher un indicateur de suite."*

John blushed. "Oh, I say, pater, I can't," he protested.

The pater began to expostulate, but the mater, with one of her quiet smiles, got up and rang the bell for the waiter.

Another thing that stood out clearly in John's memory was awakening to find the train at rest in Lyons station in the early morning. It was still quite dark outside, and the station was dimly lighted. For a few minutes there was a remote tumult of closing doors, of voices sounding small and thin in that immense cavern of silence, of little hurried footsteps and the stertorous panting of the engine, followed by a deliberate regular clang that advanced, till it smote the wheels of the carriage in which he was sitting, and slowly died out in the far distance. After that came an immense stillness; even the engine had ceased to pant; the dim gas lamps had been extinguished. In the obscurity of the shaded interior of the carriage he could just make out the forms of his father and mother, lying along the length of the seats. Outside was nothing but darkness and an impenetrable silence. And then, without any shrill whistle, hoarse shout or warning screech of the engine, the train started again, with a faint jolt of couplings and rasp of moving wheels that increased steadily until it settled down into the familiar sway and rattle that had been the whole background of the night, and sonorously roared over a long bridge.

The pater's voice came sleepily from his corner. *"Le Rhône,"* he said.

John experienced a thrill of excitement. "The Rhone," he repeated under his breath, and added: "We're going south, going south."

He had no desire to sleep again, and presently forms began to shape out of the darkness, an endless succession of them: some building close to the line with one

yellow-lighted window that hurtled past in a desperate hurry; an undefined hummock moving more deliberately, that might have been a hill or a wood of tall trees; uncertain outlines slowly separating themselves from the dark as a faint grayness crept into the sky.

"Getting light," John murmured, and rubbed the steam more eagerly from the window with the cuff of his coat.

But after that there appeared to be a hitch of some sort. For quite a long time, as it seemed to John, the dawn failed to develop; if, indeed, it did not actually grow darker. He was surprised when, quite suddenly, he realized that the world outside the train had taken to itself a definite outline; that there was a clear paleness on the rim of the eastern horizon; and that the sky, instead of being one even gray, was breaking up into the shape of moving clouds that presently brought color back to the world; at first with a flecking of palest pink at their edges—afterward with a gorgeous welter of lake and cardinal and crimson madder that crept down to infold and embar the rising of the sun.

When they stopped at Avignon, the sun was well above the horizon, and the sky swept of clouds was deepening into a serene blue.

They all got out there for five minutes and had hot coffee and rolls at the buffet on the station.

The pater was tremendously excited and as proud of the weather as if it had been one of his own ideas. "This sun's *hot* already; don't you notice it, Minnie? In London in the winter, even when you see the sun, there's no heat in it. Mother of God! think of the

aunts probably still sticking out that ghastly blizzard, while in three or four hours now, we shall be right in the middle of spring."

John also retained a vivid recollection of glimpses of the Mediterranean, seen that same day as the train ran intermittently along the sea's edge between what was then the little fishing village of St. Raphael and Nice; a vision of such almost garish color and startling clearness, that the red of the rocks, the lurid blue of sky and sea and the sharp green of the winter pines seemed not quite real.

He hardly noticed the untidy little town of Cannes, but was re-stirred to a new enthusiasm, when, after Antibes, the pater pointed out the snow-clad Alps, their peaks saffron and rose in the light of the afternoon sun.

CHAPTER V

ADOLESCENCE

THEY did not, after all, go back to England in April. Instead of that they took a flat at Cannes, quite a small place in those days, and decidedly dull after Nice, but the mater seemed keen on it, and the block of flats behind the town, in the *quartier de la Peyrière,* seemed very luxurious and splendid after St. Edmund's Terrace and the Nice *pension.* He was at the college at Nice all the week, but came home from Saturday to Monday. In the first summer holiday, they went to High Savoy for three months; first to Grenoble, and when that became too hot, to Chamonix. John had never before seen a really high mountain and was greatly impressed by Mont Blanc. The second summer they spent at Biarritz, and the third, when John was nearly eighteen, he had no holiday at all.

During those two years and a half, John retained in one sense the simple innocence of the ingenuous schoolboy who had been embarrassed by the sight of his mother without her "figure." All that he had learned in his French school—and he had learned much of which many Englishmen remain almost in ignorance throughout their lives—was not related by John to his daily experience. For him, sex was a secret thing that

had no connection in his mind with love, nor, except as a punishment exacted by nature if you were "unlucky," with the begetting of children. Knowledge he could not avoid, but it was of a kind that killed his curiosity and did not turn his thoughts toward women. The only kind of woman that he associated with the boasting of his French school-fellows was the courtesan, whether the frankly professional or the amiable *grisette*. Cocotte or coquette, were the only labels he had learned to recognize, and the latter he applied exclusively to work-girls, servants or shop assistants. Personally, he had made no experiments with either class. In the first place, he was too shy; in the second, the distaste that he never overcame for the conversation and experiences of the college dormitory made the mere thought of attempting any flirtation of this sort repellent to him. More particularly, it was all associated in his mind with a boy he detested, and who had the queer name of Goudron. It was certainly applicable, inasmuch as you could not touch him without being defiled.

It was chiefly due to this separation of essentials in his mind that the cataclysm which permanently diverted the whole current of his life was entirely unsuspected by him until it actually burst.

In the course of those years, the pater had unquestionably degenerated. Even John—still so enwrapped; in many ways a tight little blind bud of a boy—was aware that the pater was becoming more and more contemptible. He had always been, as John had come to realize, lazy and a boaster, but since he had been in France he had developed more concrete failings. He

gambled whenever he could find an opportunity, and he drank. John intensely disliked him when he was drunk, for then he became maudlin, sentimental and detestably affectionate to the mater, who repulsed him with disgust. At those times the pater reminded John most unpleasantly of Goudron. When he was very bad, John and the mater would go out together for a long walk. The pater was usually sound asleep in an armchair, or untidily stretched on a *canapé* in the salon, when they returned; and they did not disturb him.

Yet, at those times, the mater never gave John any real confidence. If he spoke of his father she would change the subject deliberately, abruptly. All the preparation he received to meet the coming change was provided by such deductions as he could draw from their conversation; and, as in the old days at St. Edmund's Terrace, he failed completely to guess the truth, although, on the Sunday night preceding his return to college for the three days that would end the summer term, the mater was—as he realized afterward—on the verge of telling him everything.

The pater was not so bad that evening, but after dinner she proposed to John that he and she should take a walk together. The pater looked up quickly when she said that.

"You're not going . . ." he began, but she cut him short by saying: "We are going our usual walk along the Vallauris Road, that's all."

The pater looked sullen and shrugged his shoulders. "You'll please yourself, of course," was all he said.

John, so far as he guessed anything from that, fan-

cied that the pater was humbugging, and really glad to be left alone to get drunk in peace.

It was a glorious night in early July, with a nearly full moon majestically ruling the eastward sky above the pine-clad hills of La Californie. The air was very still and hot as they climbed the long rise at the back of the town; and the thick white dust of the road rose at the touch of their feet like the reluctant smoke of a slow fire burning close to the surface of the earth. But when they reached the crest of the rise, they found a thin cool air blowing from the mountains behind Grasse, just visible in the moonlight as a faint speckle of white against the gray slope of the foot-hills.

The mater paused and sighed, pressing her hands to her waist. "It's certainly time we made for the mountains," she said.

"Where are we going this year?" John asked.

She turned and looked at him, her face looking very pale in the moonlight, with an expression that suddenly took him back to the night at St. Edmund's Terrace, when he had asked her about getting money from Mr. Pilkington in order to come to France. And she answered him, too, in the same tone and almost in the same words: "I hardly know, John," she said. "I'm not sure."

The scene came back to him so vividly that he could almost see his books on the table between them, and feel the texture of his old school suit; but though he was not less puzzled now than he had been then, the sense of excitement in moving on the edge of some dangerous mystery had given place to a feeling that

hovered between fear and repulsion. He believed that she was willing to give him her confidence; and he did not want to receive it. Not at that moment. Of what nature that confidence might be, he could form as yet no conception, but he knew that it had something to do with the stirring of those unclean depths that he feared to explore even when he was alone.

"We might go back to England," he suggested. "I don't mean for good, just for the hot weather."

"Your father won't do that," she said. "He says he never wants to go back again."

"You have been discussing it, then?" he asked.

"Endlessly," she replied.

She was no longer looking at him. She had turned her face to the north, to the mountains, to meet the cool breeze. There had still been the sound of a confidence in that last word of hers with its suggestion of weariness and tediously futile discussion; but he knew that she would tell him nothing definite unless he pressed her.

He looked down at his shoes, snow-white in the moonlight with the dust of the road, and the old detested phrase returned to him. Would he never outgrow the "clumping age"? He felt, at this moment, so awkward, so maladroit; physically and mentally. He was too tall, and his hands and feet were too large.

"We might go to Savoy again," he said. "I love mountains."

She did not answer him at once. She was still staring at the vague outline of the distant Alps, something darker than the darkness of the horizon. Then, "But

I don't think that *I* do," she said. "I have a longing, I find, for flat, uneventful country. I'm tired of precipices."

"Oh! well, we might go to the sea," John suggested, ignoring the possibilities of any innuendo her words might carry. "To the Atlantic, I mean. Brittany, or somewhere."

She sighed again. "There are difficulties you can't understand yet," she said, in a more practical tone. "In any case, I think I must go to London for a few days on business. I—I may have to go quite soon, before you come back on Wednesday night. I'm making a new contract with my publisher, and I have some other things to see to."

"Is there any difficulty about money?" John asked.

"Oh! no; there's no difficulty about *money*," she said. But this time, although that suggestion of a secondary meaning still haunted her words, her tone no longer hovered on the edge of a confidence.

John felt relieved. He did not want to know.

And it was probably that attitude of his, rather than sheer stupidity, which led him to ignore the sound of raised voices that night after they returned from their walk. He had gone straight to his own room when he came in. He had a suspicion that the pater would be in one of his "beastly" moods, and preferred to avoid any sight of him. And no intelligible phrase of the altercation reached him through the two walls and the width of the empty salon which were interposed between his own bedroom and that of his parents. Even his recognition of the voice, if not the words of a third person,

only stimulated him to wonder inertly, and without suspicion, why Isabelle, the *femme de chambre,* should be so late to-night in mounting to that upper floor in the roof set apart as a sleeping place for all but the most favored domestics in the building. Probably the pater was helplessly drunk again, and Isabelle, not knowing what to do with him, had waited for them to come in.

John shrugged his shoulders. So long as they did not drag him into it, he did not mind. These excesses were certainly getting more frequent, and more pronounced.

At two o'clock in the morning he was awakened by the sound of what he guessed to be the cork of a soda-water bottle flying out with a sharp report, and some one in the salon audibly humming the hackneyed refrain of *The Flood Tide.* He lighted his candle to see the time, and then the humming ceased. No doubt his light had been visible under the door. The pater was keeping it up all night, John supposed. He had never known him to do that before.

He had to leave soon after seven in the morning, and the mater was probably asleep when he knocked at her door to say good-by. He did not hear her answer.

Once or twice in the course of the next two days and a half, the memory of that Sunday night came back to him as a realization of something that was unpleasantly threatening him; something that was still there in the flat at Cannes, and to which he disliked the thought of return. Perhaps that was because it was just possible that the mater might have already left for London when he returned, and he would be alone in the flat for some days with the pater. If so, something would have to be

done about his drinking. What could one do? In any case, the sooner they went away for their holiday the better.

But why was it that he had such a queer feeling of unreality about his thought of the future? It was as if the memory of that Sunday night stood between him and all his plans; as if it were still there in the flat at Cannes, waiting to surround and desolate him.

CHAPTER VI

CALAMITY

THERE was no one there when he arrived at the flat a little after four o'clock. The concierge, who had carried up his box, had to go down again for his keys to open the front door. All the information he had was that madame had gone away on Monday morning with much luggage, and that monsieur had gone out to-day soon after one o'clock. Isabelle and the cook might be up-stairs, he would go up and inquire; or they might have gone out by the service staircase, in which case he would not have seen them.

In the *salle-à-manger* the remains of lunch were still on the table, and presently the concierge returned to say that neither Isabelle nor the cook was in her bedroom up-stairs.

It was all comprehensible enough, John assured himself. The mater had gone to London; the pater was out on the loose, and the servants were doing just what they liked. He was going to have a frightfully rotten time till the mater came back, but there was, there could be, no—calamity. The word came up in his mind with a peculiar force, as if this vague imagined misfortune that was haunting him involved much more than his individual happiness.

He found some milk in the kitchen, and from that and bread and butter from the luncheon table, he made a satisfying "tea." Afterward he searched for something to read among the miscellaneous books on the chiffonier in the salon, choosing finally, after one or two disgusted glances into works that would probably never have been allowed to remain there if the mater had read French, Balzac's *La Peau de Chagrin.* He was deep in that fascinating allegory at half past six when he heard the sound of voices in the kitchen. After a few moments of nervous hesitation he rang the bell.

Isabelle answered it without undue delay, but with a boldness and insolence of manner which he mentally labeled as *"effrontée."* Now and again recently he had suspected that Isabelle was a "coquette" of the type indicated in the conversations of Goudron. She had given him odd sidelong glances that made him blush and feel horribly uncomfortable at the moment, but had induced shy speculations in solitude as to what Goudron would have done in such circumstances.

This evening, however, her regard of him seemed to be quite free from any shade of *coquetterie.* She was boldly careless in her speech and attitude, half leaning against, half sitting upon the *canapé* as she volunteered, in answer to John's rather brusk questions, the information that madame had gone away on Monday, and that monsieur was spending the day at Monte Carlo, and would perhaps be in this evening.

"Do you know when madame will return?" John asked.

Isabelle shrugged her shoulders and smiled grimly.

John did not press that, but asked if the cook were proposing to get him any dinner.

Isabelle believed so. Was there anything else he wanted? She did not even trouble to put her question in the third person.

"No. I'll take dinner at half past seven," John said, and pointedly returned to his book.

Isabelle went out, leaving the door open behind her.

It occurred to John then, for the first time, that the mater might have left a note for him, but a careful search of the salon, his own bedroom and hers, discovered none.

But she would surely have written, he reflected, if—if anything serious had happened. Into the probable nature of that serious happening, however, he instinctively shrank from inquiring. His thought persistently avoided that. He was becoming nervously aware that his scared anticipations of "something" awaiting him here, were being justified, but he still refused to believe in the possibility of "calamity"; that final destruction of his world which impended as a horrible shadow, obscurely threatening unrealizable disaster.

What *could* have happened that would permanently affect himself? If the pater had been unbearably beastly, and he and the mater had separated, he himself would go and join her in London. It would be jolly living with her, without the pater.

After dinner, which was not so bad, though Isabelle scarcely troubled to wait on him, he lost himself again for a time in *La Peau de Chagrin.*

He had not quite finished it at half past ten when he

heard the front door slam; and then voices in the hall, Isabelle's and the pater's. He put down his book and stood up. He knew now that whatever might have happened, or was about to happen, there was going to be a row between him and the pater; and the sooner he could get it over the better. Something had to be done, and there was no one but himself to do it.

He clenched his hands and kept his eyes on the door, but no one came. The voices in the hall seemed as if they might go on for ever; for the most part they were subdued, a mere murmur with slight changes of tone that he could not interpret, but once or twice he caught a ring of excitement in his father's voice and the repetition of the word *"gagné."* What could he be talking to Isabelle about all this time, unless . . . but surely that wasn't *possible?*

Something of John's old respect for paternal authority still remained with him. When he had jumped to his feet he had been braced for instant action, ready to demand an explanation of all this mystery, to insist on an immediate and complete change in the pater's way of life. But standing there waiting, with time, abundance of time, to plan all that he ought to say, the courage began to drain out of him. He was aware of the quickened beating of his heart; his knees felt oddly weak. After all, what could he say? What authority had he? What threat to enforce that new manner of decent living he meant to prescribe? And suppose Isabelle came in, too? He could not possibly say anything before Isabelle. He loathed and detested the woman. . . .

It was more than a quarter of an hour since the pater

had come in, and for some minutes before the door opened John knew for certain what had been awaiting him. He had known since Sunday night, but the rising of the knowledge into full consciousness came, nevertheless, as the realization of a sudden and appalling calamity that must destroy his whole world. He sank back into his chair and covered his face with his hands. No shred of respect for the pater remained with him. That had gone with a queer sense of loss. He was no longer in any way afraid of him, but he dreaded his coming. Ought he to kill him?

He did not move or look up when he heard the door open at last; nor at the sound of his father's voice calling in a sprightly, would-be jaunty tone in English: "Well, my lad, I've some news for you. I was within an ace of breaking the bank this afternoon. Seventy odd thousand francs, my boy. I assure you I was in the vein. But I knew when to stop. I stopped the moment the luck turned. What the devil's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

John had an inspiration. He dropped his hands and looked up. "Yes, I feel as if I were going to be sick," he said.

The pater met his eyes for a moment, and then began to saunter up and down the room, stroking his whiskers. "In that case, I should advise you to go to bed," he remarked.

"You don't think I'm going to stay here, do you?" John demanded. "After this?"

"After this?" Mr. Fortescue repeated softly, and then began to hum a verse of *The Flood Tide:*

"Coming home, coming home; on the swelling flood tide . . ."

"You know what I mean perfectly well," John said.

Mr. Fortescue, still sauntering, raised his eyebrows and stopped his humming for a moment to say: *"Tu te trompes, mon gars. Je n'en sais rien."*

It came to John with an effect of sudden enlightenment that he could say certain things in French which he could not say in English. In the former language he had a rich vocabulary of words, become hackneyed and familiar in the school dormitory—words he had never attempted, would indeed have been unable to translate: argot of the people and of *souteneurs* gleaned by Goudron from a dozen dissipated sources.

He even cleared his throat to begin, but the shaping of the words in his mind filled him with disgust—to speak them would be to degrade himself, his father, every one. The word *miche* had risen to his lips, a word of almost classic origin if not recognized by the Academy, but surrounded, for John, with all the unclean associations that were at once loathesome and shamefully alluring; the temptation to unnamable vice. No; he could never call his father a *miche*.

There was a long pause before he mumbled in English: "Why has the mater gone away, then?"

Mr. Fortescue shrugged his shoulders. "Business?" he said. "Perhaps. A woman's vagary? As for that . . ."

"D'you mean she's coming back?" John asked.

"Probably not, in my opinion," was the reply.

This sort of thing might go on for ever, John reflected. His father—he could never think of him again

as "the pater"—it had too friendly an air, was too closely allied with the still sanctified name of "mater"; this man, his father, possibly imagined that there was nothing more against him as yet than a vague suspicion which, if he were sufficiently careful, might never be confirmed. But John was not going to argue that. It was ghastly enough without being named. Besides he had no real proof.

He got up resolutely. "Well, I'm going to join her," he said. "At once. My box isn't unpacked yet. I shall go by the early train to-morrow."

"That's as you please, of course." Mr. Fortescue had stopped his slightly voluptuous pacing of the room and was lounging against the back of the *canapé,* in much the same attitude as Isabelle had taken a few hours ago. Every now and again he put his tongue between his lips and slightly tossed his head. Not once did he look at his son. His next words showed that he was not even thinking of him. "Over seventy thousand francs"; he soliloquized softly, repeating, with an effect of caressing each syllable: *"Plus de soixante-dix mille francs."*

"Has the mater gone to St. Edmund's Terrace?" John demanded.

"I should not think so," was the reply.

"Where has she gone then?" John asked.

"I've no idea," Mr. Fortescue said; "but I don't suppose it's at all likely that she'll ever show her face in St. Edmund's Terrace again. Oh! no. She'd hardly do that." He seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to his son, but there was something in the tone of his words that gave John a queer uneasiness.

"Why not?" he asked.

Mr. Fortescue stood up with a sigh, as if he were reluctantly leaving his own delightful fancies in order to attend to a piece of necessary but very distasteful business. "I'm afraid that we must come to an understanding, you and I," he said. "It would have been better in many ways if you had been told the truth earlier. Much better. But poor Minnie was always very firm on that point. And before we came here there were the aunts to consider. The aunts! Great heavens, how my chains have fallen away. At forty-three, not after all so disabling an age, I begin life afresh untrammeled. 'Coming home, coming home; on the swelling flood tide.' "

John stared at him in silence. His nervousness had returned, the beating of his heart, the weakness of his knees. Through all that effect of posturing and self-congratulation, there had been signs of uneasiness in his father's speech. And what had he meant by "poor Minnie"? Had anything horrible happened to her?

"You see, my lad," Mr. Fortescue continued, "I married very young. Whatever you do, my lad, don't marry too young. It's a great mistake."

His tone was grave, reflective, the tone of a man who makes a revelation for which he hopes to find sympathy. His expression, too, was in accord with that attitude. He had taken up his favorite position before the fireplace, with his hands under the skirts of his coat; and as he spoke he kept his gaze fixed on the opposite wall with an intent serious stare. But his body from the shoulders down was taking no part in the confes-

sion. The slight rhythmical movement of the bending knees and the rising and falling heels kept time to a tune for which it was not difficult to find words. While Mr. Fortescue's mind was occupied with his solemn revelations, his body danced to the refrain:

"Coming home, coming home, on the swelling flood tide;
Plus de soixante-dix mille francs."

John's legs refused to bear him any longer. He sat down and leaned forward with his head in his hands, staring down at the carpet. The sight of that obscene dancing distracted his thoughts.

"A very great mistake, John," Mr. Fortescue repeated; "and particularly if you marry a woman much older than yourself."

He made a long pause there, but John did not look up. For one moment he had foolishly believed that the mater must be much older than he had supposed, but some imaginative faculty within him, a faculty that just now seemed to be teeming with extraordinary suggestions, dismissed that explanation with a spurt of angry impatience. No, his father must have been married twice.

"I won't go into all that," Mr. Fortescue continued in a more urgent tone. "Impossible for you to understand as yet. There were faults on both sides, of course. I was absurdly young, absurdly young. Just twenty-three, and she was nearly forty. I don't attempt to excuse myself for that mistake. I merely plead my youth and ignorance of the world; above all, the romanticism of the artist. Which explains, also, why I fell in love some six months before you were born. For that, I

ask no forgiveness. It was natural, inevitable. Under the circumstances, quite inevitable. We were both of us in the same muddle. She was barely twenty-one and married to a man of over fifty. Inevitably we came together; inevitably we——"

He was interrupted by the sound of a cautious but perfectly audible rapping on the wall; stopped abruptly, and then said in a louder voice: "Well, look here, my lad, I'll tell you the rest in the morning."

"No." It was almost a shout, so that John himself was startled by the sound of his own voice.

Until the call of that vile signal had aroused him, he had been almost ready to sympathize with the story of his father's past. He had forgotten the dissipated man of forty-three before the fireplace in the thought of the old days in St. Edmund's Terrace; of papa and of her whom he had had no right to call mama. He had had a vision of the lower part of the tapestry; the figure of what he had been told was a crouching hare; and the two dogs who were apparently quite oblivious of its existence. In those days, Johnny had wanted desperately to call their attention to it.

But that lewd summons and his father's response to it, had suddenly roused him. He had but one idea now; not of revenge, nor even of recrimination, but to know the whole truth as soon as possible, and be done with it all, for ever. What he was going to do he did not yet know, but he could not stay in this flat with—the description came to him on the spur of the moment and remained—with "those two."

"No," he repeated, with equal vehemence, getting up

and instinctively moving to intercept his father's approach to the bedroom. "Never mind that ——" (the French description he so fluently found for Isabelle opened Mr. Fortescue's eyes in a start of astonishment). "I must know. I must know. Look here, do you mean that the mater's not my mother?"

"Well, well. In effect, no," Mr. Fortescue replied uneasily.

"And is my mother still alive?"

"Autant que je sache."

From that point onward, Mr. Fortescue confined himself entirely to the French language. It had always been for him a means of disguise; an ambush.

"Were you and she—divorced?" John continued.

"She divorced me."

"And—and the mater?"

"Her husband refused to divorce her. Too pious." He did his best to flick his sentences into some effect of insouciance, of gaiety.

Surely that was all he wanted to know, John thought; all that was essential. He had no concern then with the lesser mysteries of that old story; he wanted so desperately to be done with it, and get away to some place in which he could feel clean again.

"Oh! well. Of course I'm not going to stop here," he said.

"I have said that is as you wish," his father replied. "Meanwhile you will have need of some money."

"Do you think I'd take money from you?" John replied boyishly and chiefly for the sake of an obvious insult. He had not, so far, considered that important point.

Mr. Fortescue flushed and tried to appear taller than he actually was, some three inches shorter than his son. "You're a silly young fool," was the substance of his reply.

"I'll find work of some kind," John boasted.

"In Nice or Cannes? at the commencement of July?" Mr. Fortescue carelessly reminded him. "No, my lad, the best thing you can do is to return to the aunts. They will look after you. Oh! my God."

The expletive had been due to a repetition of the muffled tapping on the wall, and the way being now open for him, Mr. Fortescue took a couple of steps toward the bedroom door.

John, on the other side of the room, made no attempt to stop him. The last few sentences had recalled him to a consciousness of his own destitution. He had been suddenly confronted with his own poverty and complete helplessness. All his life he had been provided for, every arrangement had been made for him. Now, he was utterly alone, woefully independent. It was as if he had died and awakened to find himself in a strange and unresponsive world, ruled by unknown laws.

Mr. Fortescue had paused. His first movement of escape toward the bedroom door had an air of furtively evading interference, but as no resistance was offered, he pulled himself together. Dignity was beyond him, but he could at least find a gesture. He drew out his pocketbook and flung it toward John.

"Take what you want for the journey," he said. "And if I don't see you again in the morning, *bon voyage.*"

His hand went up to his whiskers, and his step, as he

went into the next room, had resumed its tripping insouciance. He was again humming the refrain of *The Flood Tide.*

(At that time John was incapable of understanding all that lay underneath what simply appeared to him as the sheer infamy of his father's attitude; a heartless, shameful abandonment of himself and of all decency. But every incident of that night's scene had impressed itself deeply in his mind, so that, years later, he could, he believed, recall details that he had not consciously noted when they were actually passing before him. And then, ripened by knowledge of the world, he came to find excuses for his father; to realize the desperation of a weak man, seeking to escape the denunciation of his own conscience, recklessly descending from deep to deep, in order to avoid any possibility of return.)

The pocketbook had fallen with a solid thud on the carpet. He stooped and picked it up. It bulged almost to bursting with thousand-franc notes, untidily crammed into the pockets, more than seventy of them; nearly three thousand pounds!

To-morrow his father might go back to the tables and lose it all, but that would make no difference to John, moving alone in that strange uninterested world in which he had no place.

For it came to him more and more strongly that he could not go back to St. Edmund's Terrace. He did not want to see the aunts ever again, nor London, nor England, nor anything that could remind him of the desolate fact that she whom he had believed to be his mother, had abandoned him not less heartlessly than

his father, without even a word of good-by. She did not care. She had never cared. What he had believed to be affection was nothing more than an outward show in order to keep up appearances. Was she, after all, so much better than Isabelle?

No, he could not go back to London. He must face this inimical hard world, and learn its unknown rules. How ghastly life was.

He opened the pocketbook and methodically smoothed out, refolded and counted the thousand-franc notes. The estimate had been perfectly correct; there were seventy-three of them; seventy-three keys to open the doors of the strange world and find a means of living. To go out with no key was to find death.

He saw it all, the past and the present, with the uncompromising regard of youth; a picture of definite crude outlines, with black shadows and staring high lights. And the subject of the tapestry was not Joshua with his feet in the shadows of the earth and his head almost on a level with God, but of an ill-used, forsaken John, ignorant and scared, driven out into the darkness, perhaps to starve, by a false contemptible father and a pseudo-mother who did not care whether he lived or died.

His first step on the road to independence was to provide himself with a key and an excuse for taking it.

He left on the writing-table a note in English; no one but his father would be able to read it.

I found that there were seventy-three thousand francs in your pocketbook, and I have borrowed three

thousand to go on with till I can get work. I shall pay you back as soon as I can. I've put the pocketbook at the back of the right-hand drawer under the papers. —JOHN.

He left the flat next morning before the cook came down-stairs. He had enough small change in his pocket to tip the concierge and take his ticket to Nice. He went there because he knew the town, and since he must go out alone into the wilderness he preferred a wilderness with which he had some acquaintance.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

MOST young men of John's condition come to independent life by a process that allows time for the gradual hardening of physical and moral fiber; pass through some period of training that represents a transition stage between the shelter of home and the exposure of a separate existence. John fell into life suddenly and without preparation. Moreover he had neither the knowledge nor the self-reliance of the average Englishman of eighteen, forty years ago. In some ways he was rather a stupid boy, not because he lacked the potentialities of a reasonably able man but because he belonged to the type that develops slowly. If his life had followed a normal course, he would probably not have begun to think for himself before the age of twenty-five or so. But when, within a single hour, a man loses most of the standards by which his judgment has hitherto been guided, he is compelled to find new ones for himself.

He was still a little stunned on that Thursday morning when he returned blindly to Nice as being the only town in France in which he would not feel utterly lonely and strange; and when he had modestly breakfasted for forty centimes on rolls and black coffee,

dipping his dry roll into the coffee in the manner he had learned at the college, he had no plan for the future nor even for the day that was already beginning to blaze in front of him.

He had left his box and a bag in the *consigne* at the station; in his pocket he had three thousand francs in notes; and his chief concern at the moment was to find a safe resting-place for these encumbrances. He knew that it would not be safe for him to carry about the equivalent of one hundred and twenty pounds in his pocket. He had but two ideas in this connection; a hotel for his baggage and the *Caisse d'épargne* for his money. He had never himself deposited any money in the French Savings' Bank, but he knew all about its methods from the boys at the college. As to the hotel, he realized that it must be a cheap one, cheaper than any of which he had so far had experience; but he knew of no alternative that might be cheaper still.

Consultation with the waiter, who was also the patron, evoked the essential that the kind of place monsieur was seeking, for some unaccountable purpose of his own, was to be found in the old town by the harbor, but it would be better, the patron thought, to refer the matter to his wife who was a true Nicoise and knew the town better than himself who came originally from Italy, and had only settled in Nice a few months earlier. Madame, however, shook her head at the suggestion of these small inns by the port, and her sympathetic curiosity presently led John to give her his confidence up to the point of explaining that while he had enough money to keep him for six months, or with greater econ-

omy for perhaps a year, he had come to Nice to find work. After that, although madame had no practical suggestions to offer in regard to John's search for employment, she was apparently prepared to discuss his affairs and her own for the rest of the morning, and began by telling him all her own family history, laying particular stress on the achievements of her brother who was a *pharmacien* at Marseilles. It was understood that if he had been there to give advice all would have been well.

John began to get very bored with madame after twenty minutes, but she was exceedingly difficult to stop when she was wound up; and the diversion came eventually by a suggestion of her husband that Madame Mathieu, who had a *chambre meublée* to let, might accommodate monsieur. This suggestion was immediately acclaimed by madame as an inspiration of genius worthy of the Marseilles *pharmacien.* And since she was apparently willing to put the rest of her life at John's disposal, she proposed to accompany him to Madame Mathieu's immediately—the last word, as John soon discovered, being used relatively, and in its southern acceptation.

Madame Mathieu turned out to be a Provençale who accepted John on the trustworthy introduction of her friend, but regarded him with evident suspicion when he quietly accepted her determined assurance that she could not possibly let him the room for less than fifteen francs a week. Until then she had believed him to be some kind of Frenchman; she had known many who had the same kind of finnicking accent, pronouncing

"Kanzer," for instance, as "quinze"; but when he refused to bargain she at once suspected him of being a foreigner—probably Irish, she guessed, having once met a man of that breed.

John did not contradict her. He knew that for some historical reason, dating back to the time of the Stuarts, the Irish were regarded with greater favor than the English in France. All he wanted, just then, was a little peace and quiet to adjust himself to his new conditions, and think out some plan for getting work. If Madame Mathieu had demanded twenty francs a week instead of fifteen, he would have been equally complacent.

But Madame Mathieu was not a "cheat" in the English sense, she was not even close-fisted. She bargained over everything, firstly, because bargaining meant conversation, and she was never really at ease unless she were talking, and secondly, because she had never known things bought and sold or any arrangement made without this interesting preliminary. When, therefore, John impolitely refused to play the game, she was momentarily nonplussed. She looked at *Madame la patronne* with lifted eyebrows and shrugged shoulders, as if she sought some excuse.

Fortunately *la patronne* was a woman of tact. The effect of her reply was that John was poor and ignorant, though it did not sound at all insulting to him in French, and this gave Madame Mathieu the opportunity she had been seeking to launch forthwith into an elaborate explanation of why she was unable to accept less than fifteen francs a week. She was quite willing now, since there was no one with whom she could bar-

gain, to do it all herself, and within a quarter of an hour she had successfully beaten herself down to twelve francs, and might have gone still lower if John had not interposed.

It took him the best part of a week to overcome the very unfavorable impression he had created at this first interview, but after that madame took him to her heart. She had to "cheat" him in small things just as she purloined casual vegetables or an odd egg now and again at the market—life would have had no savor without a little traffic of that kind—but she more than made it up to him in other ways. She was, indeed, a generous and kindly woman; and regarded by her neighbors, and the men and women of the market, as an *honnête femme*. In England she might have found herself in prison; but in Nice she was respected. And the outcast John, in search of new standards, learned many lessons from her.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before he found himself free to settle the matter of his two encumbrances, and as he came out of the narrow sunless street that was to be all his "home" for the next two years, it was as if he walked into a heat that was almost tangible, some new medium that had a quality something between air and water. For a few moments he found it pleasant, and then he crossed to the shady side of the road.

His first business was with the post-office, where he deposited twenty-nine hundred francs, received his *"livret nominatif,"* and emerged with four gold pieces of twenty francs each and twenty francs in silver. For the first time he had a sense of being well supplied with

money. He calculated that he would be able to live quite comfortably in Nice on fifty francs a week; and had therefore enough money to maintain himself for at least a year, even if he could find no work.

For a time he found a sense of comfort and protection in that thought; but then a vision of his father came to him, his father in dressing-gown and slippers, doing nothing all day, living on the money earned by his mistress's writing; a detestable figure, and, so John saw it in his youthful absolutism, a horrible warning of what he, himself, might become if he idled away his time. Moreover, this pleasant defense of his against the cold disregard of the world was not his own money. He had no right to it. It was a loan, and must be paid back as soon as possible.

He made a tentative inquiry of the man with the barrow who transported his luggage from the *consigne* to Madame Mathieu's, but that individual knew of no work likely to be at all suitable for the monsieur, whom he had decided from the first moment to regard as a young man of means.

"But if it is nothing to me what kind of work I do," John explained. "I would push a barrow like you."

The porter thought it well to discourage that idea from the outset. He had no desire to compete against a young, active, and, possibly, even diligent competitor.

"Vous plaisantez, monsieur," he began, and when John swore that he did not, went on to explain that he with all his labor and ceaseless activity would never be able to live on his poor earnings if it were not that his good wife also worked all day as a *femme de ménage.*

And having started on this hopeful story, he expanded it with realistic detail, putting down the barrow in the middle of the street in order to make his miseries more convincing by the use of gesture.

By the time they arrived at Madame Mathieu's door, John had definitely relinquished his ambition to work as an out-porter, and was contemplating an act of considerable generosity that was intercepted only by the appearance of Madame Mathieu herself. She had been deprived of her rights once that morning, and meant now to enjoy herself. John's little attempt to interpose was ruthlessly thrust on one side; and he presently took shelter in the house from a torrent of language that grew more and more raucous and less and less like French as Madame warmed to her work. She had found a foeman worthy of her steel in the person of the porter. John was afraid that there was going to be a genuine *"rixe"* this time; but the little *épicier,* who lived opposite and was for some time an interested listener, displayed no sign of alarm even when madame and the porter were at their most violent. He would probably not have listened at all if he had not been something of a connoisseur and able to appreciate madame's virtuosity.

John's familiar world had fallen away from him with a suddenness only comparable to the crashing of those standards of judgment he had pondered in the night. All the appearance of life was one great lie; a respectable façade to hide the shameful interior. She whom he had adored was but one degree better than the detestable Isabelle. His father was an unspeakable cad. His

real mother could never have had one spark of natural feeling for him. And just outside the door, the porter whose wretched condition had appealed to John's natural generosity, was being revealed as one who had amassed wealth by deceiving the rich and swindling the poor; while Madame Mathieu's past life had evidently been nothing but a record of continual vice. Yet after all the unforgivable things of which each had accused the other in voices that had, as it were, placarded the whole length of the street, these two parted, at last, politely, even amicably. An agreement was arrived at, and in an instant the quarrel was forgotten. The porter received his wage, wiped his forehead, bade his late antagonist a pleasant *"Bon jour, madame,"* and went off singing, followed by an equally cordial *"B'jour, m'siou."*

The lying façade, John supposed, had been put back again after those twenty minutes of shameful exposure. And though all the street might now know what lay behind it, it was only the façade that mattered.

It was an act of abandonment on John's part that led him to seek work so low in the social scale. He had reacted with youthful violence to what he called on the spur of the moment "all this ghastly shamming." And if the recent exposure of the hardly less reprehensible shamming in low life revealed the same social attitude, it still seemed to him that honesty could be sought only on the lower levels, where the truth was at least nearer the surface. Among the poor the façade was quite obviously a dummy to be carelessly shoved aside in an argument over five sous. In the society in which he had hitherto moved—out of dormitory hours—the street

front was meant to deceive, and might achieve its purpose for nearly twenty years in spite of the opportunities he had had to peer through the windows. He remembered his sight of the mater without her figure in the hotel bedroom in Paris. If he had been clever enough, he thought, he might have found his fable there. All the social conventions were nothing but acts of concealment of one's figure, one's opinions, one's self. And yet, he had never until last night suspected a truth that was positively staring him in the face. He had never had the wit to suspect anything. All those years ago in St. Edmund's Terrace, he had not been able to infer that "Aunt" Lizzie was no relation of his. In future he meant to remedy that failure in himself; he meant to suspect everybody.

He lunched where he had breakfasted, but had no further opportunity for intimate conversation with either the patron or his wife, who were now fully occupied. Despite their earlier appearance of having had nothing to do for the rest of their lives, everything had been ready for the busy hours between twelve and three; and now, although to the northerner the service might have seemed provokingly leisurely, it achieved its purpose to everybody's final satisfaction.

John had gone early to the little restaurant, full of determination to get work at once, but when he came out a little before one o'clock, he soon realized that he must await the convenience of the world of possible employers. Nice was eating and drinking and would presently be dozing, sheltered from the fierceness of the July sun, and he would find no one to listen to him

before three o'clock at the earliest. Until then he must conform to the methods of the South, lounge in the shadow waiting for the earth to turn a few more degrees toward the comparative coolness of the night.

The later afternoon found him wistfully regarding the shipping in the harbor. So far his inquiries had led him no further than the halls of the second-class hotels where his entry had at first been greeted with smiles that had completely changed their character when he had blushingly asked for work—as clerk, boots, porter, anything. "In October, perhaps," the deputy manageress had said, pitying his youth. Even his English was useless in July. Italian would have been far more useful, or modern Greek.

As he had come out into the blinding street, it had seemed to him as if the whole of Nice were closed down for the dog-days. In the full length of that clear wide avenue, not a single *persienne* was open to the day. Nothing moved, the road was empty of traffic, the pavement of foot-passengers, the leaves of the platanes were rigidly motionless. He was alone in a world populated only by handsome white houses, with tightly shuttered windows, dignified, self-contained, aloof.

But he found life by the harbor, and he might have resorted to the classic expedient of running away to sea if he had seen a vessel that promised the least chance of taking him; if Nice, for instance, had been Marseilles or Genoa. As it was, he knew enough to realize that the two little Mediterranean coasters, all the shipping from other ports that the harbor contained, would have no use for a lad of eighteen who did not know the

name of a single rope or spar. Also, he was not tempted. However picturesque those two dingy sailing vessels might be, they were appallingly dirty on close inspection. Moreover, he did not speak Italian; and so far as he could gather the crew spoke nothing else.

He had temporarily abandoned his search for work when he came to the builders' yard at the foot of the hill going up to Villefranche and read: *"Entreprise Générale du Batiment,"* and underneath in scrawled chalk letters: *"On demande des manœuvres."*

He understood then that according to precedent he had failed to draw any inference from the plain legible facts that had been presented to him. All along the Riviera, from the Esterel to Menton, French, Germans, Italians and Swiss were building not urgently but steadily about this nucleus of the famous city of Nice. Probably none of these speculators foresaw that the bait of this lovely country with its attractive winter climate and the added lure provided by the Principality of Monaco, would in time so far increase the demand for Hotels and Villas that the string of small towns—Cannes, St. Juan-les-Pins, Antibes, Cagnes, on one side; Villefranche, Beaulieu on the other—would, within fifty years, be overlapping their boundaries, foreshadowing the possibility of one long city of pleasure, pinned for half its length to the narrow strip of land between hill and sea. But the builders, of whatever nationality, could not fail to recognize that there was a perpetually increasing demand for their work, and they were fulfilling it.

John had heard occasional talk of this prosperity of

the building trade, but it had never until this moment occurred to him that it was here that he might find the work he desired. Yet surely in no other business in Nice would he find for the next three months a notice with that invitation, *"On demande . . ."*

He wiped the sweat from his forehead and briskly entered the yard. Had he not been invited to enter? But he had no idea of what the duties of a *"manœuvre"* might be, nor even whether it was not in itself a duty rather than a person who performed it.

The foreman of the yard, whom he found in a little wooden shanty labeled "bureau," looked very doubtfully at John when he asked by way of a beginning the technical meaning of this familiar word.

"M——! C'est Français," was his reply. He was sure of that, though he, himself, was a Piémontais and his knowledge of the French language a comparatively recent acquisition.

John, remembering Madame Mathieu's attribution of his nationality that morning, explained himself as an Irishman; and assuming that a *manœuvre* in this connection was a performer rather than a performance put his question another way by asking what he would have to do.

He inferred from the hurried résumé of the foreman that his duty would be to attend on the masons and do what he was told. Particularly he would have to carry the "bird."

"L'oiseau!" John repeated, doubtful if he had not misinterpreted the Italian accent.

The foreman explained by a vivid piece of pantomime, crouching forward from the waist, slightly bend-

ing his knees and throwing his hands up to his shoulders. He had carried a hod, himself, in his youth, and John instantly recognized the posture—and hesitated.

He saw himself going up a ladder with that awkward receptacle, not the long-handled English hod that can be carried almost negligently over one shoulder, but a clumsy two-handled affair that did not leave a hand free for a saving grip on rung or scaffold at a height of perhaps forty feet or more above street level. He had watched a mason's laborer at his work not long before, and had wondered at his nonchalance. Even to John's uncritical eye, it had not seemed an easy thing to do.

The foreman grinned. He had no doubt already decided that John was far too well dressed for the job. *"Ça ne vous va?"* he inquired.

"Oh! I'll try," John said desperately. "When should I begin?"

"To-morrow morning. Six o'clock," the foreman replied, still regarding John with obvious amusement.

"And my wages?"

"Fifteen francs a week—to begin."

John thought of Madame Mathieu. That was the sum she had originally asked for her room. He ought, of course, to have offered her five. She would probably have accepted eight. He was beginning to realize the new scale of economic values that was to be his criterion in this new life. But one could not bargain with an employer, surely?

"Very well," he agreed.

He did not guess until next morning that the foreman never expected to see him again.

John's chief concerns that night were whether he

could possibly get up a ladder carrying the "bird"; and what clothes he could wear. The latter problem worried him almost as much as if he had been invited to a garden-party. He decided that to-morrow he would manage with some very old flannels and rope-soled shoes. He had an idea that he might be able to get a better grip of the rungs of the ladder in those beech-shoes.

He found nothing worse than fleas in his room, and very few of them considering. The mosquitoes had been excluded by the simple process of lining the *persiennes* with muslin, and keeping them always closed. John did not open them. Even on this first night of his new life, he was beginning to adapt himself.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO YEARS' HARD LABOR

JOHN'S most poignant memories of the two years he spent in the employment of the firm of Passicot, *Entrepreneurs* of Nice, were associated with the first weeks; and when he spoke of them, he would say with a touch of that naïveté which never left him: "I've no notion why I stuck to it. Probably, I suppose, because it never occurred to me to do anything else."

Yet his initiation into the duties of a *manœuvre*—which is French for a mason's or bricklayer's "laborer"—must have tried his physical endurance to the utmost. The carrying of that "infernal bird" seemed to strain every muscle of his body; but more particularly the muscles of his arms, shoulders and back. He suffered his greatest agony on beginning the work the second morning, but it was weeks before the pain entirely disappeared. Fortunately he was not working for hard task-masters. If his immediate chief, the mason, had to wait for his mortar or cement, he made no fuss about it; while the foreman on the works, a handsome Florentine, did not consider it any part of his duty to speed up his underlings.

A critical northerner, watching the progress of one of Passicot's jobs, would have jeered at the immense

leisureliness with which every operation was conducted; would have remarked scathingly that that was not the way one worked in the higher latitudes. And yet the work was always done and well done, and if it took longer to build a house in the neighborhood of Nice than in that of London, the house itself was all the better for it; since no building operation is the better for being performed quickly. In this connection, at least, the South has learned the wisdom of the injunction, *Festina lente;* and knows the secret of its proper practise. If it had not been for that saving element, John would certainly have collapsed in the first few days.

He had little trouble with his fellow-workmen. At first he was the object of a few practical jokes and rough horse-play, but he took both good-naturedly; and they dropped treating him as a "Monsieur," and ironically addressing him in the third person when they found that he could not be shocked. Even Goudron's training, John found, had its uses. After that he became the *"Irlandais,"* and soon came to be treated with a certain respect for the proficiency he developed in the great Provençal game of *Les Boules,* which was always played for an hour or two in the afternoon. He had a good eye, and his English appetite for games, so terribly starved during the past two years and a half, awoke to new life. From his first initiation into the game he had hitherto only seen played in the streets, he became the keenest player on the works, and within six months the most skilled.

He had ceased to carry a hod by that time. The ma-

son for whom he chiefly worked, a shrewd old Provençal from Nîmes, had remarked his capacity and northern energy from the first day; and very soon began to delegate to John the minor duties of his own trade. He soon dropped the hod for the chisel and mallet, and developed such a natural appetite for these tools that on the completion of the job for which he had been first engaged, he was taken on again by the firm as an *"ouvrier"* at a wage of thirty francs a week. He had learned by then to live on that. With his next rise as assistant to a carver—an Italian who had been struck by the *"chef d'œuvre"* John had voluntarily submitted as the work of his leisure hours—he was able to save a little money. Of his original three thousand francs nearly two thousand five hundred remained intact.

He was approaching his twentieth birthday and was seriously contemplating the project of going to Carrara with the idea of training himself to become a sculptor, when a casual encounter on the *plage* once more altered the course of his life.

He probably would not have recognized his father if it had not been for the queer half-startled, half-furtive glance that rested on him for a moment with an odd effect of contact.

John stopped and turned round. Was it possible, he wondered, that his father could have altered so much as all that? All the bounce had gone from his walk. Although he no longer looked dissipated, and was respectably dressed, his cheap clothes were those of the French lower middle-class, and his whiskers, too, were gone. Lastly, to John, he looked so very much smaller

than the man who had swaggered before the fireplace on the night of the great calamity. If it had not been for that light of recognition he had seen in his eyes, John might have thought that this casual promenader bore an amusing likeness to his father—nothing more.

Even so, John would not have spoken to him if he had not been intrigued by the little man's obvious desire to escape further notice. He winced perceptibly as his son's heavy calloused hand was laid none too gently on his shoulder.

"Hullo! John!" he said timidly.

They were the first English words that had been directly addressed to John for nearly two years.

"Hullo!" he replied, and there for a few moments the conversation stopped. Neither could think of anything further to say. They had walked on side by side for another twenty yards before Mr. Fortescue cleared his throat and continued:

"Doing all right?"

From first to last the interview was conducted in English, although to both of them the French language had by now become the more familiar. But just as Mr. Fortescue had once found a satisfaction for his vanity in speaking French in England; so now, after two years of intimate French life, he got the same satisfaction from speaking English in France. Also, in the present embarrassing situation his native language had the air of being a safeguard. He felt that his son might so much more easily abuse him in French. And to John, also, English came with a sense of relief. It offered a means of bridging an awkward situation.

"Not badly," he said. "I'm a mason and carver. I work on that big new hotel we're building on the *plage* down there."

"Get well paid?"

"Fifty francs a week, now. Not so bad. I can live on less than that."

"You've grown," Mr. Fortescue commented.

It was true. He had added a couple of inches to his height in the course of the last two years, and now stood exactly six feet in his stockings. And in other ways he had grown still more; he had, for instance, certainly added more than two inches to the girth of his chest. In his coarse blue shirt, open at the neck, his soiled canvas trousers and *espadrilles,* with his clean-shaved face and bare forearms tanned to a rich smooth brown, he looked a fine figure of a stalwart young workman.

"Very likely," John agreed carelessly, adding with a touch of contempt. "But what has happened to you? You look smaller. And why have you cut off your whiskers?"

Mr. Fortescue's hand went up to his cheek with an instinctive movement of protection. "Oh! I don't know," he said.

Something in the gesture reminded John of the jests of the workmen, when a very hairy little Frenchman, with a virago for a wife, had turned up at the works one morning clean-shaved and with his head cropped. No one had recognized him at first. The fierce-looking little man had been suddenly revealed as the naturally weak victim of a strong-minded woman.

"Afraid of having them pulled?" he asked.

"What do you know about it?" Mr. Fortescue replied uneasily; and John, remembering Albert the Bold whom the hairdresser had converted within ten minutes into Albert the Meek, guessed the truth in a flash.

"I say, you're not still living with Isabelle, are you?" he asked.

"We've got a shop," Mr. Fortescue admitted. "A *librairie* and music-shop combined. Her father and mother live with us."

John chuckled. "Doing all right?" he inquired.

"Yes, very well, in a way," Mr. Fortescue said. "It pays, you know, the shop; and we invested that money I won at Monte Carlo. Most of it, at least. Only, Isabelle is frightfully close. Keeps me awfully short. She's got Breton stock in her. The old man's a Breton. They think of nothing but saving."

"Why do you stick it?" John asked.

Mr. Fortescue's eyes shifted uneasily from point to point of the landscape, almost as if he sought some avenue of flight, but his tone was gay, and he lightly twirled the cheap cane he was carrying, as he said:

"But why shouldn't I, John? I am extremely comfortable."

A memory returned to John of his last evening in the Cannes flat, and of his father boasting that he was about to begin life afresh at forty-three, released from all his "chains."

"Free to do whatever you like, now, are you?" he commented.

Mr. Fortescue glanced suspiciously up at him. "What

do you know about it?" he asked for the second time.

But John, despite his vow to suspect every one, was little more suspicious now than he had been as a schoolboy. He was quicker in drawing certain inferences, because he had widened his experience of men and women, but outside the knowledge thus acquired, he was as ingenuous as ever.

"Nothing but what you've told me," he said. "But you gave me the idea, somehow, that Isabelle kept a pretty tight hand on you."

Mr. Fortescue threw back his shoulders and raised his head. John could almost see again the vanished "*favoris*." "It's not a question of a tight hand," he said; "but of new duties, new responsibilities. You see, John, I am married, now. And you, by the way, have a little half-sister."

John whistled. He had before him a vivid picture of Isabelle's handsome, flaunting beauty marred by the lack of width between the rather small dark eyes. If he could do a true portrait of her in stone, she would appear as an ugly woman. It was her hair, coloring and skin that saved her. At forty, she would be a hag. He thanked his stars that he was not married to her.

"That surprises you?" Mr. Fortescue inquired blandly.

John shrugged his shoulders. "I left off being surprised at anything you could do, two years ago," he said.

"You are too young, yet, to understand," Mr. Fortescue began, but John interrupted him. He wanted no explanations.

"Ever hear anything from—from the people at home?" he put in.

"Occasionally," his father said, apparently quite willing to change the conversation. "Lizzie died about six months ago; and poor Caroline, I'm afraid, is now almost totally blind. It's very sad. She is still living at St. Edmund's Terrace, with an attendant."

"Oh, lord! How rotten!" commented John.

"Very sad," Mr. Fortescue repeated.

"No one else?" John continued after a pause.

"Eh?" His father did not appear to understand the question.

"Do you ever hear from any one else?" John asked. "From . . . from . . . well, from the mater, I mean?"

"Never!" returned Mr. Fortescue firmly, needlessly clinching that definite negative by adding: "One couldn't expect it."

"Don't know where she is, even?"

"No idea whatever."

This subject was evidently distasteful to Mr. Fortescue, and John, himself, had no wish to pursue it any further. He had, indeed, but one thing more that he wanted to say; and he brought it out now, without any further introduction.

"Never paid you back those three thousand francs I borrowed," he said.

Mr. Fortescue started, and flicked his cane. For a moment the jauntiness came back into his walk. He might have been on the point of humming *The Flood Tide*. Then his eyes flickered and his step flagged again. Just so might some half-domesticated animal

have pricked its ears at a passing impulse to escape and relapsed again into docility as its captor laid the familiar hand, whether caressing or brutal, on its neck.

"Got more than two thousand francs still left," John explained.

Mr. Fortescue had to find an attitude.

"My dear boy, that was . . . er . . . my contribution to the completion of your education," he said. "Shall we say the fee for your indentures to the craft of the carver?" He spoke bravely enough, but it seemed as if his mind were still surreptitiously occupied with some problem. It may have been the possibility of secreting a certain sum from the avaricious eyes of his wife and her father. If that were so, his next sentence indicated the hopelessness of that project.

"But if you happen to have ten francs on you," he continued, "I'd like to borrow it. I stupidly left my purse behind me when I came out, and I have one or two things to get on my way back."

"Rather," John agreed readily, produced a flat leather purse from his hip pocket and offered his father a gold louis.

"Better take twenty," he said.

"Ah! thanks very much, John." Mr. Fortescue rather overdid the effect of carelessness, and his son, watching him, was again reminded of incidents in the life of Albert the Meek.

"Going to risk it?" he asked.

"Eh? Risk what?" his father inquired.

John had to think for a moment before he recovered the English for *"bamboche."* "A spree," he said.

Mr. Fortescue frowned, attempting dignity.

John grinned. "You used not to be ashamed of it in the old days," he said. "Isabelle seems to have been training you." And as he spoke, it came to him that his father had found his fitting destiny. He ought to have been thrashed into submission all those years ago at St. Edmund's Terrace. The aunts had restrained him, but they had not been strong enough to prevent his breaking away. After that . . .

"It's what you've always wanted, the whip," he continued. "Now you've got it, and it seems to be doing you good. Hadn't you better give me back those twenty francs? The fun you'll have won't be worth the licking you'll get afterward."

For a moment, Mr. Fortescue tried to meet the contemptuous stare of his son's steady eyes. Then with all the haughtiness he could assume, he turned from him and marched away down the parade. His shrugged shoulders, the carriage of his head, the dignity of his walk were no doubt intended to convey a reproach of his son's ingratitude. But John, looking after him, was aware only of pity for the little man's feebleness. He was, indeed, pitiful; such a poor little thing; this intimidated, powerless captive of the terrible Isabelle and her miserly Breton father. Yet once he had seemed to John to be a powerful, important creature.

And even now John did not know the ultimate depth of turpitude to which the "poor thing" had descended.

He stood stock-still on the promenade in the blazing June sun, staring after the little figure of his father as it dwindled into invisibility. Before him was the bril-

liant southern panorama, almost crude in the violence of its coloring; but over it another picture was superimposed, at first with a sort of transparency as if he could see through it the red bluff of the cliff beyond the port and the aquamarine of the calm sea; then gaining in detail and solidity so that the vision of Nice faded and he saw himself impatiently fidgeting at the window of a dark gray room; his attention divided between the snow-smothered street and the station omnibus without; and the two middle-aged women within to whom he had come to say good-by. One of them was dead now, and the other almost completely blind.

A pert work-girl passed, threw him a coquettish smile, and wished him good day; but he neither saw nor heard her.

The door of the dark room had opened, and a puff of gray-brown smoke ducked suddenly out of the chimney as the mater entered. He saw her standing there in her furs, and knew that she was asking him if he were ready to come now. She was looking at him with that detached half-questioning glance of hers, that he had never understood until the night of the "calamity."

And suddenly he wanted desperately to see her again, her and that gray cold land of mist and half-lights that was his most prominent memory of London. He wanted to ask her all about the years he was too young to remember, and why she had left him without a word; to tell her what had happened to the pitiful little figure who must once have seemed to her a lovable human being; and to show her what he, himself, had become.

For the first time in four and a half years, he was

smitten with a craving attack of homesickness. He felt that he belonged to England, to London, to a world of greater activity and sterner standards of life. He had a strange sense that some one over there had need of him. Poor blind Aunt Caroline, perhaps; still living in St. Edmund's Terrace, with no one to look after her but an attendant.

Well, there was no reason why he should not go.

He came back with a queer feeling of a return after absence to a realization of the hot sun, of the dust and glare of the streets, of gay sun-blinds and closed green shutters; the faint whispering of the stagnant sea.

CHAPTER IX

THE RETURN

JOHN did not go home at once. He could not wait until the hotel he was working upon was finished; to do that meant at least another six months in Nice. But there was a particular job in the yard that he wanted to see through, namely, the roughing out in marble of the two caryatids that supported the hood of the main entrance. This was valuable experience for him, and he decided that he could not afford to miss it. His master, the Italian from Carrara, regarded John as a promising pupil, and was taking pains with his instruction. When John confided to him the plan of returning to England, he strongly discouraged the idea. He knew all there was to know about that country; he had a brother-in-law who had spent two years there; and he gave John the full benefit of his ripe knowledge. It appeared, among other things, that London was a place of perpetual fog and almost absolute darkness, where it was always cold and always raining; and the people never smiled. For himself, the Italian confessed, crossing himself devoutly, he would prefer the lesser terrors of Purgatory. Beyond that the English were a cold and benighted people with no knowledge of Art, the only art treasures they possessed having been stolen from Italy.

John attempted no contradiction of any of these statements; refraining not so much because he was still supposed to be an Irishman, as because he knew that his word would not be accepted before that of the experienced Italian traveler who had furnished the information long enough ago for his report to have become by much repetition a sacred article of faith. Instead, he professed a suitable astonishment by French and Italian ejaculations; having by now become fairly efficient in the colloquial use of the latter language.

He left Nice toward the end of September, crossing the Channel by the night-boat from Dieppe to Newhaven, and his first impression on landing was that his Italian master had been right after all, and that England was a sad and gloomy country. Also, an uncommonly cold one. He had forgotten that he would need an overcoat, despite all the warnings he had received, and that peculiarly vivid memory of the blizzard in which he had departed nearly five years earlier. The sun had cleared the morning mists before he reached the outskirts of London, lighting the heavy dew that sparkled on the grass and was scored in places by the dark footprints of early laborers; but to John it all looked gray and under-colored. And when at Clapham Junction, he saw the sun, still low in the sky, showing a copper disk through the murk of smoke, he began to wonder if he had not, indeed, been altogether mistaken in believing that there was little difference between London and any other Continental town as regards warmth and atmosphere.

His tendency toward a temporary exaggeration of

those differences was further increased by the journey through the sulphurous smoke of the old Metropolitan from Victoria to Baker Street. Ever since he had had control of his own purse, he had lived cheaply; and the journey from Victoria to the north side of Regent's Park seemed to him too long to be undertaken in a cab. He had intended going on by the District Railway to St. John's Wood Road; but the smoke at Baker Street was too much for him, and shouldering his box, and carrying his portmanteau, he made for the upper air.

The ticket-collector, misled by John's richly bronzed face and French clothes—a suit he had bought in Nice for fête days, some six months earlier—facetiously greeted him with *"parley francey"* as a likely opening; and John, thinking at the moment of nothing but his escape from the smoke, blew out a deep breath of relief and replied, *"Qu'on étouffe là-dessous."*

The collector's grin widened. Foreigners always amused him, poor things. "Got far to go?" he inquired, speaking very loudly in order to make his meaning perfectly clear.

"St. Edmund's Terrace, that's all. I suppose I can get a cab of some sort?" John said.

The collector's grin gave place to a stare of affronted suspicion. "Oh! You can speak English all right when you want to, can yer?" he grumbled.

"I am English," John explained, smiling. "But I've been living in France for the last five years nearly, and one gets the habit of talking French."

The collector apparently decided to accept this explanation.

"Ho! I thought you was one of those Hi-tallians," he explained. "You can get a cab off the rank there."

John was reflecting that the English workman did not speak his own language nearly so well as the French workman spoke his. The cockney tongue had a wry sour tone, he thought, after the mellowness of the southern speech.

It was just nine o'clock when he arrived at St. Edmund's Terrace.

He had not written to announce his coming. He had not wanted the mater to know that he was in England, until he had talked to Aunt Caroline, whose letters must now be almost public property. It might happen that the mater herself would open his letter, he had thought; and he had not made up his mind whether he would ever see her again. She might prefer not to see him.

The door was opened to him by Ellen, the cook, who had been with them for two years before he had gone away. She stared at him standing there beside his luggage on the top step, a queer foreign-looking man, smiling at her in that familiar way.

"You don't remember me, Ellen?" he said.

"No, that I don't," she returned bruskly. She came from the Midlands, and seven years' service in London had not allayed her innate distrust of the wickedness of the city. She did not pause to consider that a thief does not usually bring his luggage with him.

"I'm Master John," he explained, still smiling.

Even then, she had to pause and think before she remembered him, chiefly as the young gentleman who

was not sufficiently careful about wiping his boots before he came into her hall.

"Well, I'd never have known you," she admitted, without any sign of enthusiasm. "Did you wish to see Miss Fortescue? She's having her breakfast."

"You might tell her I'm here," John suggested.

She left him standing on the top step and from there he heard her announcement of him as "a young man who says he's Master John come back," followed by a little cry, whether of surprise or alarm, presumably emanating from Aunt Caroline. It had, he thought, little sound of welcome in it.

"Miss Fortescue says you're to come in," was Ellen's message on her return, and he followed her into the old familiar room; perceptibly smaller, shabbier, dingier than his memory of it, but clamorous with associations.

Aunt Caroline was standing at the head of the table steadying herself against it with both hands. She was looking directly at him, but with a blind stare that was directed at his chest rather than his face, as if she unconsciously adapted her gaze to her memory of his old height.

"John?" she said tremulously.

"Yes, it's really me, Aunt Caroline," he said, crossing the room and laying his hand on hers where it rested on the table. "Don't you remember my voice?"

She turned toward him, and releasing her fingers, passed them up his arm to his shoulders. "But how immensely you have grown," she said. "You're so big. And your voice is bigger, too, and different. But I think I recognize it."

Ellen, still standing at the open door, confirmed her identification. "It's him, right enough, miss," she said. She was looking at John's boots. "Though I didn't know him, myself, at first. I suppose he'll want breakfast."

"Oh! You will, won't you, John?" Miss Fortescue agreed; and John, who was badly wanting breakfast, explained that he had crossed by the night-boat, and had had nothing but some "stuff they called coffee" at the Newhaven buffet.

"Oh! and I haven't introduced you to Miss Ellis," Miss Fortescue exclaimed as Ellen left the room.

Miss Ellis, who had risen when John came in, and remained standing, a passive but interested spectator, bowed slightly as her name was mentioned. She was a woman who might have been of any age between thirty and forty, with brown eyes, a dark freckled complexion, and an immense coronet of hair the color of old mahogany. When the sun caught it, a strand here and here glowed a deep red. She had a tendency toward stoutness, and her figure, constricted into the shape of an hour-glass, looked stiff and wooden underneath her tightly-fitting tweed dress.

"I don't know what I should have done without Miss Ellis after poor Lizzie died," Miss Fortescue added. "It was quite providential my hearing of her, just at the right moment . . ."

She was evidently launched on a long reminiscence, but Miss Ellis interrupted her by saying, "I expect Mr. Fortescue must be tired. I suppose he has been traveling all night."

"Two days and two nights," John said quietly. He

found it necessary to pitch his voice lower in these surroundings; subdue the powerful ring of it to a more decorous tone. "I left Nice on Tuesday morning. I traveled third-class, you know; so I couldn't take the *rapide*."

"Oh! you must be tired!" Miss Ellis exclaimed.

"But why did you travel third-class?" Miss Fortescue inquired.

"Well, it's cheaper, you know," John said.

Miss Fortescue nodded. "It's a long way to come for a holiday," she remarked, as if she were thinking aloud; and then continued: "But it was nice of you to come straight to me, John; and, of course, you'll stay with me while you're here. There's your old room; or your father's if you'd prefer it? Miss Ellis has poor Lizzie's old room because it opens out of mine, which is so much more convenient for us both, even if it's farther to go to the bathroom. Though we are lucky to have a bathroom at all. They haven't one next door, you know. The trouble is with Ellen and the hot-water . . ."

The house was all Aunt Caroline's world, now; and she had never been out of England. John's return after his Odyssey was to her nothing but a casual visit from a nephew who had been away for some time, and had, rather inexplicably, grown enormously bigger in the interval. She continued her news of the world while John ate his breakfast, wondering how much she knew of the "calamity," and of his own and his father's doings since that critical date. So far she had not asked him a single question about himself.

It was Miss Ellis who, at last, stemmed the meander-

ing stream of her conversation. "Now, you haven't finished your toast, Miss Fortescue," she said, and then turning to John, "Is Nice a pretty place?" she asked.

"Very," John replied, finding the task of describing Nice to one who had never, probably, seen the Mediterranean, altogether beyond his powers.

"I've always pictured it as being a little like Brighton," Miss Ellis encouraged him.

"It isn't. Not a bit," John said.

"With the hills behind, and the sea and all?" Miss Ellis suggested.

John shook his head. "It's like an Italian town, you know," he tried. "Was Italian once, of course, and no end of Italians live there. The architecture and all that makes you think of Italy."

"I suppose you know Italy well?" Miss Ellis said.

"Hardly at all," John admitted. "I went to San Remo once."

Miss Ellis regarded him with an admiring interest. "It makes those far-away places seem so real," she said, "to meet some one who has actually seen them."

Miss Fortescue's straying fingers had successfully explored her plate and its immediate neighborhood, and, her toast being finished, she came back into the conversation by saying: "Now, when you've finished, John, I suspect you'd like to rest for a bit. Miss Ellis and I always take a devotional half-hour after breakfast; but Ellen will help you up with your box. Did you say you'd prefer your old room or the front one?"

"Oh! thanks very much, Aunt Caroline, my old room, please."

He was not feeling tired, but he was glad of an excuse to get away. He had not come back to England for this. But, presently perhaps, he would be able to get Aunt Caroline alone, and find out what she knew of the past two years of her brother's life and his own. He had a vague suspicion that she did not know much.

His old bedroom was at the back of the house and the sun was shining in at the window; a curiously pale, innocuous sun, it seemed to him, but grateful nevertheless. He took off his boots when he had partly unpacked his box, and lay down on the bed that, like everything else in St. Edmund's Terrace, had grown so much smaller while he had been away.

He was awakened nearly two hours later by the sound of a voice calling softly to him from the other side of the door:

"John, John, are you asleep?"

The last time he had been within reach of her, it had been he who had called from the outside of the door.

"Coming," he replied. He was suddenly excited. In that moment of awakening, he had almost forgotten his doubts and suspicions. It was so natural that she should come to him like this, in the old familiar room. It must have been for this that he had come home.

She held out both her hands to him as he opened the door.

"But, John, why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she said. "And, goodness, what a great creature you've grown into."

She had changed, too, he thought. She looked younger, more eager, less reserved. And once again, after

more than two years, he was uncomfortably conscious of his own clumsiness.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, answering her question. "Thought I'd surprise you, perhaps."

"Well, are you coming down to tell me all about it?" she asked. "There's no one in the drawing-room. Caroline has gone out for a little walk with Miss Ellis. They didn't expect me this morning. It was Ellen who told me you were here."

"Rather. I'll come down. I must put something on my feet first," John said.

All that he had in the way of slippers was a pair of the felt-soled cloth *savates* that are frequently worn by French workmen in the streets. He hesitated for a moment as to whether he would not put on his boots again; then shrugged his shoulders and slipped his feet into the *savates*. He *was* a workman. He had no cause to be ashamed of the fact. The responsibility for it did not lie upon his own shoulders.

And it was his feet and hands that drew the attention of her for whom he had now no name, when they were seated together in the drawing-room; attracted her observation and puzzled her, coming between her and her thought of what she was saying, so that she broke off in the middle of the slightly too voluble explanation of her presence in St. Edmund's Terrace that morning, to ask, "What have you been doing to your hands, John?"

"Working," he replied grimly.

"At what?" she queried.

"Carrying a hod to begin with," he said; "then I got promoted to being assistant mason. I was a carver

when I left, earning fifty francs a week. Good wages in Nice."

"But why?" she demanded. The perplexed frown of her lowered eyebrows had deepened. She appeared to hover between mystification and a growing suspicion of some unforgivable deception.

"Well, I had to find some work, and that was the first that offered," John explained. "It was a bit stiff at first, of course, but I liked it all right afterward."

"Were you living with him, with your father, all the time?" she put in.

"Good lord! No," John said. "Never saw him again until about two months ago, when I met him in the street. It was that made me think of coming home for a bit."

She drew in her breath sharply between her teeth as if they had been painfully set on edge. "Oh! please explain everything to me," she begged him. "I don't in the least understand what happened after I went away."

And by degrees, prompted by continual questions, John gave her a more or less comprehensive account of the night of the "calamity," his own subsequent adventures, and the meeting with his father; making it sufficiently plain by various implications that he knew the truth now about his own origin; also, if with greater delicacy, that he had believed her cold-hearted and faithless. He returned, somewhat obliquely, to the latter theme as he concluded: "I've often wondered why you never wrote."

"I did," she said.

For a moment they looked at each other without

speaking, John's mouth shaping itself to an unsounded whistle. They understood, but both of them hesitated to name the man who had cheated them.

"I suppose you sent me money?" John murmured, after that silent interchange of confidence.

"Every month," she said, but did not add that the amount of her monthly remittance had been twenty pounds. Instead, she went on rapidly, as if anxious to get away from that aspect of the affair. "Honestly, John, I hadn't time the morning I left. It all happened so suddenly. I was asleep when you went. I had been awake all night. . . . And then . . ." She made a face of infinite disgust; and added: "That horrible woman, you know."

John nodded sympathetically. "She leads him a hell of a life," he said. "Won't let him have a *sou*. He borrowed twenty francs from me that day; though he wouldn't take back the three thousand I'd had from him. Did I tell you that he has married her?"

She seemed to contemplate that for an instant, before she took up her own apology again, by saying: "But I did write to you from Paris, on the Tuesday, wasn't it, and sent you some money then, to go on with, in a registered letter."

"Probably arrived on Thursday morning after I'd gone," John commented. "But look here, mater, didn't you wonder why I never wrote to you?"

She made a little grimace. "No," she said. "I understood that you were always frightfully deep in your exams, working tremendously hard to become an *avocat!* And then, I thought you had never really cared

much, and had probably no wish to write to me. If it hadn't been for that I dare say I should have been suspicious. But I wasn't. They were very clever letters, too. I can see now how clever they were."

"Good lord!" John remarked with a deep sigh, adding after a brief pause: "But he's paying for it now. I'm certain she leads him a hell of a life. He has shaved off his whiskers, so that she shan't have the chance to pull 'em."

The *ci-devant* Mrs. Fortescue winced slightly, and waved all that aspect of the affair away from her with a gesture of disgust. "Never mind," she said. "Let's forget all about it. Now, tell me, John, what you intend to do?"

"No idea," he said.

"You're staying with Caroline for the present, I suppose?"

"She thinks I've come for a holiday," he agreed. "She hasn't so far asked me a single question about myself."

"She lives so much in her own little world, now," Mrs. Fortescue explained. "More than ever since Lizzie died. She was terribly grieved at the time, but it seems to have done her good in a queer way. She was always under Lizzie's thumb, and now she's free, for the first time in her life, to do what she likes."

"Except for Miss What's-her-name," John said, remembering how Aunt Caroline had been set to finish her toast at breakfast, while her companion took up the conversation.

"Miss Ellis, yes, but that's not the same thing, you know. She's independent so far as money is concerned.

Lizzie left her about six hundred a year, I think. If you behave yourself, it'll probably come to you later."

"Oh! I don't want it, thank you," John replied sturdily. "I can get work as a carver. If I don't go back to study at Carrara, that is."

"Do you want to go back?" she asked.

He was not sure. Within the last half-hour, he had found a reason for coming home and staying there. Something he had unconsciously longed for all his life had taken shape and a name. He wanted affection from some one belonging to him. That home-life with papa and mama, which he had as a boy believed to be the pattern of normality, had proved to be an immense sham. So far from his upbringing having been typical, it had been altogether exceptional. He had never had a "family" in the sense that other boys had; had no one really, now, belonging to him except a reprehensible, entirely negligible father and a blind half-aunt who was not interested in his affairs.

"I don't know," he said, answering her question. "In some ways, perhaps. One feels a bit lonely at times."

"Among foreigners?" she suggested, missing his point.

"Not so much that," he replied, frowning and embarrassed. "It's more . . . well . . . there not being any one in particular who cares what becomes of me, if you know what I mean?"

"Of course. Poor old John!" she said. "You have had a lonely life for the last two years. Now you'd better stay at home and Caroline and I will look after you. We'll talk it over together, after lunch."

It was, John supposed, all that he could expect; and yet her response lacked something he had hoped to find there. She had so changed since he last saw her. She looked so much younger and happier than she had when she went away. But it seemed that despite all her kindness in trying to provide for him, and the way she had come to call him just now, she had not really changed toward him. She would always be kind, ready to help him, but he must not ever expect that she could come to regard him as her own son.

Well, he would stay for a fortnight, in any case, and then, if he wished to, he could return to Nice or go to Carrara. He was free to do whatever he chose.

They had all been released by his father's act in deserting them. It was only the deserter himself who had fallen into a deeper, more intolerable bondage.

CHAPTER X

PETERSON

THE Malorys were still living in St. James's Terrace. They were greater swells than ever, John learned, now that Mr. Mallory had been knighted. But neither Aunt Minnie—which was the new title the mater had assumed—nor Aunt Caroline had as they said kept up with the Mallorys. It was to be inferred that they were distinctly difficult to keep up with, nowadays.

John had had no intention of going to see them until his new English clothes were ready, and in the interval of waiting he decided not to go at all. Miss Ellis liked to talk about the Mallorys, and it was from her that he received the impression of their being "very grand" people, who kept even grander company. At one of their receptions, last summer, the waiting tail of carriages had stretched up the side street and round the corner into St. Edmund's Terrace; magnificent pair-horse carriages, some of them with a coronet on the panel of the door, Miss Ellis told him. People like that, John thought, would prefer not to renew the acquaintance of a clumsy young French workman, whose father had married a servant-girl and kept a shop. The Mallorys, as he remembered them, were an awfully jolly

sort and not a bit snobby; but even they must draw the line somewhere.

From his bedroom window he could see a corner of the garden behind their house; and once he caught sight of some one that might have been Lady Mallory. He could not be sure, because she did not cross the one little patch of grass that could be seen clearly in an opening between the trees. And although he always looked down at that wee open space whenever he went up to his own room, and sometimes watched it for quite half an hour, he saw no one else in the course of the next few days. The Mallorys had never used that garden much; but in the old days Teddy had occasionally signaled to him from there. Five years ago, he had been able to see the lawn more clearly. The trees had grown since then.

And then on the afternoon of his fifth day in England he met Lady Mallory in the park, as he was coming from the tailor's, after trying on his new English suits. If he had not a little lost his presence of mind she would not have known him, but his slight pause and his look of recognition caught her attention, although she was so very well accustomed to being recognized by people whom she had never met. Had not some version of those widely-set eyes, that braided coronet of hair, the placidity of that curved mouth, appeared in one at least of her husband's Academy pictures for more than twenty years? His critics had said that he could paint no other type of woman; and endless engravings, to say nothing of occasional "presentation plates," had made

Lady Mallory's face one of the most familiar in all England.

"It's never John," she said, before he had time to pretend that he had not known her.

"I only got back a day or two ago," he explained. It was not at all what he had meant to say, but the sight of her, looking so exactly as she had always looked, put the thought of the Mallorys' "grandness" completely out of his mind.

"And you've been here a day or two and not been in to see us?" she exclaimed.

"Well, I didn't know . . ." John began, and finding that opening impossible, continued, "It's such a long time since I went away, I thought you might have forgotten me."

She reproved him with a quietly uplifted forefinger. "You mean that you had forgotten us," she said.

"Oh! Indeed, I hadn't," he protested. "How could I possibly have forgotten you?"

She looked up at him reflectively with those strangely virginal gray eyes of hers. She was the mother of four children, and was only two years short of her silver wedding; but her eyes had the calm reserve of innocent maidenhood. As some one had said of her, she looked as though she were acquainted with love and pain but had never known either of them intimately. "Is your father home, too?" she asked.

"No, he isn't coming. Never; I suspect," John replied, blushing.

"And your mother?"

"Perhaps I ought to tell you," John began, but she interrupted him.

"My dear John, we knew; always," she said. "Has she left him?"

He nodded. "More than two years ago," he told her.

"I like her books," Lady Mallory remarked thoughtfully. "You must tell her to come to see us, John. Are you staying with her?"

"No; I'm living with Aunt Caroline for the moment," he explained; "until I've decided what I'm going to do, that is."

"What do you want to do?" she asked, and when he hesitated, went on, "But now, you must come back to tea and tell us all about it. I was only just giving myself a little airing, and we'll go back together and have tea at once."

"Oh! thanks awfully; but I couldn't come in these clothes," John protested.

"My dear John! What nonsense!" Lady Mallory said, with a pretty little bubble of girlish laughter. "Such old friends as we are! Besides, they're very nice clothes. You'll find Vincent in his old smock all smeared with paint where he wipes his fingers on it. Of course you'll come."

John felt that he might possibly have refused in French, but was quite unable to do it convincingly in his own language. His English had developed very little since he was fifteen, and he had a sense, this afternoon, of being still about that age.

"I've just come from trying on a new suit," he apologized. "This one is so beastly French."

"As if that mattered with us!" Lady Mallory reproached him.

Miss Ellis was evidently quite wrong in suggesting

that the Mallorys had become such very "grand" people.

The house in St. James's Terrace had not altered any more than its owners. It had always seemed very rich and splendid to John, full of beautiful pieces of furniture and warm colors, yet with nothing of the museum about it. Sir Vincent's taste, as his pictures showed, was for the sturdily handsome in decoration. He disliked the least hint of finicking. He might accord an esthetic commendation to the style of Sheraton, or even to that of the eighteenth-century French schools, but he never painted them. His own furniture and his pictures showed his preference for the robuster lines associated with the period of Queen Anne; and for color that glowed, such as burnished copper or rich blues.

Sir Vincent, as his wife had anticipated, was in the studio; an addition to the original house, built out at the back and entered from the landing between the ground and first floors. He, too, was unchanged and looked no smaller, though John and he were now about the same height. But Sir Vincent was so perfectly proportioned that he always seemed to set the scale in whatever surroundings he might be. There were no new lines about the clear well-opened eyes; no thread of white, as yet, in his magnificent hair or beard, no thickening of the wonderfully chiseled lines of the nose. Whatever else had changed, John could find no shade of difference in Sir Vincent and Lady Mallory. After all his experience he still saw them with the same eyes.

"John? Absurd! Of course it isn't!" Sir Vincent said, when his wife introduced him. "Good heavens, I

never thought he'd have made such a big chap as this. Where did you get those shoulders, John? Been going in for prize-fighting or physical development?"

John thought this a good opportunity to get through the worst of his confession without any humiliating introductions. "Carrying a hod, I think, sir, in the first instance," he said; "and afterward working as a mason."

Sir Vincent put back his head and looked John in the eyes with an expression that combined astonishment and approval. "Splendid!" he commented. "I've got an architect coming in to see me this afternoon. Peterson. You know his name probably. Wants me to do a frieze for the Art Gallery he's building in the North. You must talk to him and tell him how they build in France. He'll be interested. Clever fellow. You'll like him."

"But did you really carry a hod, John?" Lady Mallory put in. "Wasn't that very hard and very unpleasant work?"

John gave them details, avoiding mention of his father. It was easy, now, to talk to them; and he forgot to be ashamed of his tight trousers and the coat that was too bunchy over the hips. The Mallorys were both so understanding and sympathetic; and seemed even to admire him for having been a workman.

He learned, on his side, that Edward, who had just begun his second year at Oxford, had not yet decided what he was going to be, having failed as yet to develop any particular talent; that Helen was studying art and was a clever colorist, but weak in drawing—an accom-

plishment which at that period was still considered necessary for an artist; that Jane was at home, and Viva at school at Cheltenham.

"But you'll see Viva when we go into the drawing-room," Lady Mallory added. "Vincent did such a wonderful portrait of her while she was at home last holidays. It hasn't been shown yet, and we shall probably keep it, now, for next year's Academy."

John had a queer thrill of excitement at the prospect of seeing that portrait. She had been such a lovely child; but she was fifteen now, and perhaps altered almost beyond recognition. He hesitated between eagerness to find out what those five years had done for her, and a wish to keep the old ideal unchanged. But he was glad, in any case, that she would not see him in these beastly French clothes.

He became uncomfortably aware of them again when the butler announced that Mr. Peterson and tea were both in the drawing-room; and Sir Vincent, discarding his smock, and hastily cleaning his fingers with medium and a rag, was discovered as a very elegantly dressed personage. He was wearing a black velvet coat, it is true, but it was beautifully cut, and the rest of him was fit for an afternoon call in any society. And goodness only knew who might be found in the drawing-room besides Mr. Peterson; though John discovered grounds for hoping society in general was not expected, in the fact that Lady Mallory had not taken off her bonnet.

This preoccupation with the incongruity of his own appearance on entering the drawing-room temporarily distracted his thought from the portrait of Viva, and it

passed out of his mind for the time being, although his fear of too much company was instantly relieved. No one was there except Mr. Peterson and Jane, grown into a homely young woman of eighteen—she had always been the least noticeable of the Mallory children. But from the first moment, John's attention was occupied. Sir Vincent introduced him to the architect as "a young friend of mine recently in the French building trade"; and Mr. Peterson took up that subject with instant avidity.

He had a clever face, John thought, but odd-looking; clean-shaved, with a hawk nose and a very long chin; a type associated with the church, the law or the stage, and more particularly at a period in which most men wore at least a mustache. He spoke rapidly and with a certain eagerness, as if he had little time to spare.

For a time John found himself the center of attention. The Mallorys seemed quite content to listen, and even to find a peculiar interest and amusement in John's complete ignorance of the English technical terms of his trade; Mr. Peterson being equally ignorant of the French. Once or twice he had to make a sketch in his note-book before a translation could be agreed upon.

Afterward, while Mr. Peterson was discussing the question of the frescoes with Sir Vincent, John was talked to and interrogated at some length by Lady Mallory and Jane; and it was not until the subject of the portrait was introduced by Mr. Peterson himself that John's thoughts came back to it.

"By Jove, that's a striking thing, Sir Vincent," the architect exclaimed suddenly, in a voice that caught

John's attention and made him turn and look over his shoulder in the direction plainly indicated by Peterson's intent gaze. The adjective was well chosen.

The dark blue figured brocade of the background, the tall oak armchair with its back of embossed leather, the white "party" frock and black silk stockings of the sitter, were all painted with the astonishing skill that produces at its best the effect of a colored photograph. Mallory could paint the texture of a material convincingly enough to produce the illusion that, under the microscope, the very threads of it would become visible. But all this was familiar, representative of the period. It was the subject that was striking.

The young girl was leaning forward, one foot partly withdrawn under the chair, her hands on the lions' heads that terminated its arms; her eyes alight, her lips slightly parted. She seemed about to rise and speak, and the observer could not doubt that her speech would be a protest.

"My youngest daughter," Sir Vincent explained modestly.

Every one got up to stand in a semicircle before the picture.

"The vitality of it is perfectly astounding," Peterson commented after a moment's silence. "This is your masterpiece, Sir Vincent."

"So every one says—except the subject herself," Lady Mallory said.

Peterson turned to her with one of his abrupt jerky movements. "Eh! Is that so?" he asked. "Well, her opinion should be worth having."

"It isn't that she criticizes the painting," Lady Mallory explained; "but she says that she can't bear to look at it. She is a queer child in some ways. She begged her father to destroy the picture before she came back from school."

Mr. Peterson looked puzzled. "Do you know at all why she dislikes it so?" he asked.

"Just a child's whim, I suppose," Sir Vincent replied. "She's an inconstant piece of femininity at all times." He was as modest about his children as about his work.

John believed that he understood better than that; but he could not trust himself to speak. At the first glance he had been completely overcome by this living portrait of Viva; had recognized instantly the full significance and inevitability of it. Viva, the child he so vividly remembered, could not, he knew now, have become anything but this. It was as if he had once known her at fifteen and inexplicably forgotten. But after those first few seconds of enraptured admiration, the portrait began to irritate him. He longed for it to speak, to move. He felt that it was unfair to Viva, a horrible misrepresentation of her vitality, to hold her in this frozen attitude. Surely that protest, so visible on her lips, was against this crystallization of her generous eager life into a single pose that represented such a tiny fraction of the wide range of her character and emotions.

"Inconstant? Eh?" Mr. Peterson mused, again earnestly contemplating the portrait. "Perhaps, on the surface. Mercurial, at least."

"Well, after this I don't think even the most captious

critic will be able to say again that Vincent can paint only one type of woman," Lady Mallory put in.

"An absurd libel, in any case," Mr. Peterson replied; "though I, for one, could never blame him for admiring and reproducing so captivating a type." He bowed to Lady Mallory as he proffered the compliment, and she smilingly curtseyed her acknowledgment.

"And what's the verdict of our young friend, the sculptor?" he continued, looking at John. "He has made no comment as yet."

John blushed. How easy it seemed for men like this to say the right things, to admire the paintings of Sir Vincent, or pay a compliment to his wife. Why should he himself feel so clumsy and stupid? Why did he feel completely unable, now, to praise the portrait of Viva? It was true that he resented it, but there was half a dozen obvious aspects that he could surely praise in all sincerity.

"It—it's almost *too* much alive," he stammered. Mr. Peterson's mouth spread into a wry smile that was at once ironical and approving; but the Mallorys accepted John's criticism as the nicest of compliments.

"You think that's possible?" Lady Mallory asked.

"One longs for it to speak," John added. "It—it makes one a little impatient."

The Mallorys were still flattered. This simple admission that the portrait produced so strong an effect of life, was to them the highest praise; evidence of the art that got into the home. Landseer, Cooper, Millais and Luke Fildes were among the contemporary witnesses.

"I think that's partly what Viva feels," Jane remarked, speaking for the first time since the portrait had been under discussion. "She says it makes her want to scream."

"She'll get over that," her father remarked tolerantly.

"Fifteen is rather an excitable age," his wife added.

And, after that, John was not called upon to elaborate his criticism. He felt that he had mercifully escaped, but he was not satisfied. He had not wanted to produce a false impression. That was the sort of thing his father used to do, and he did not wish to resemble him in any way. Also, he believed that Mr. Peterson had guessed something of what had been in his mind. Perhaps he would find an opportunity later to explain himself, if not to the Mallorys (he doubted his ability to say anything more to them; besides which it would be frightful cheek to criticize Sir Vincent's art), then to this odd intelligent architect.

That opportunity was deliberately forced upon him a little later. Mr. Peterson, after half an hour spent in the studio discussing the question of the frescoes with Sir Vincent, returned to the drawing-room, ostensibly to say good-by to Lady Mallory, but, it seemed to John, mainly with the purpose of taking him away.

"You going too, eh?" he asked, and without waiting for a reply hooked him by the arm. "Good," he continued as if John had expressed his perfect willingness. "I want to ask you a lot more questions. I make no excuses to Lady Mallory. She can see you any day. Sir Vincent tells me you live just round the corner."

He kept his hand through John's arm as they walked together across the park; but it was not until they were half a mile from St. James's Terrace, and his cross-examination of John in French building methods was becoming a trifle perfunctory, that he said, with his abrupt change of manner: "So you don't think much of that picture, eh? Now why?"

John could think of no reason other than that he had already offered. "It makes me feel impatient, restless," he said.

"Which is not an effect you demand from art?"

"Well, no," John said. "But . . ."

Mr. Peterson gave him a grunt of encouragement.

"But all I mean to say is," John continued, "that I don't think I was criticizing the *art* of the thing at all. I don't, as a matter of fact, know anything about it. Sir Vincent is frightfully good, isn't he?"

"If it's good art to give you the fidgets . . ." Mr. Peterson said, leaving his sentence hanging with an effect of tentative inquiry.

"But the drawing and the color, and the way he makes things look so tremendously real?" John protested.

"Yes, he's a wonderful craftsman. Wonderful!" was Mr. Peterson's comment.

"I suspect that's what I mean," John admitted.

"And craftsmanship contents you?" Mr. Peterson asked.

"I don't know," John said. "I don't believe I've ever thought about it."

"Probably not. But you know it doesn't, all the

same," Mr. Peterson replied. "If it did, you wouldn't have squirmed and hung your head in front of Mallory's picture. Now, when that portrait is reproduced and given away with the Christmas number of some annual, do you think the great British public will find it irritating? Not they, my boy. They'll say it's wonderful; that it can almost speak; only they won't say it as you did this afternoon in disparagement; they will mean it, as the Mallorys took it just now, for supreme praise."

"Well, why did you praise it too, to Sir Vincent?" John demanded.

"You'll know when you're forty-five," Mr. Peterson replied, with a new harshness in his voice. "If you've had your nose to the grindstone for a quarter of a century, that's to say. If you've had to learn that you must give what *they* want, or starve. Why did I praise the damned thing? Because my employers want Mallory to do those frescoes. Because I can't *afford* to be honest, that's why." Then with a complete change of voice he continued. "Queer thing, I should trust you with all that, isn't it? Specially as I believe you've got something of the artist in you, and that artists are an utterly untrustworthy crew. But you won't give me away. I know that. Also," his mouth twisted into the satiric grin that made him look more than ever like an inspired gargoyle, "Mallory'll do the frescoes all right. He's a great craftsman, and I admire him. Yes, upon my soul, I do. And envy him. He's never had a doubt, that man; never questioned his own gifts. He's as honest as—as you are yourself, my boy. A good friend to

have. Stick to him. Now, are you coming to see me at my office to-morrow afternoon? I've got a proposal to make to you."

"A proposal?" John murmured. He was completely bewildered. He wanted time to take all that last speech to pieces and examine them separately. It had been full of revolutionary, peace-destroying suggestions that required the most deliberate consideration.

Mr. Peterson appeared to be suddenly pressed for time. "Yes; yes. I'm thinking of making an architect of you," he said. "Here's my card. Come and see me to-morrow, about four."

A most extraordinary chap altogether. He was off before John had time to say another word; walking—the thought came unexpectedly into John's mind—like a pair of scissors. While John himself stood stock-still by York Gate, feeling as if, after being caught up in a whirlwind, he had been set down there, miraculously unhurt, in a sudden calm.

He turned slowly as Mr. Peterson disappeared into the Euston Road, and returned deliberately across the park. He intended to give his mind to earnest reflection on the two main problems that had been so astonishingly set him; the criticism of the Mallorys, who had for the first time and without any warning been presented to him as people who might, perhaps, be criticized; and the question of his own future. But he had not taken half a dozen steps before another thought interposed, besieging him vehemently as if in fierce protest against having been hitherto overlooked; a thought that made him grow hot and angry, so that he in-

stinctively quickened his pace until he was plunging round the outer circle as if pricked by an invisible goad.

"Make a 'presentation plate' of that portrait of Viva? To be hung up and stared at by half a million careless eyes? To be vulgarized, made a commonplace, in every middle-class home in England? Oh! no! It wasn't possible. Of course, she wanted it to be destroyed."

CHAPTER XI

HONESTY

ACCORDING to Mr. Peterson, honesty was an ideal virtue of small practical value. To be honest, he maintained, you must be overwhelmingly convinced of your own rightness, which meant being a fanatic, a crank. Adopt a cause with your whole being and die for it, he said, and your descendants will say, "Yes, he was an honest man, but a fool." Moreover honesty in architecture was becoming less and less possible in modern conditions. "A fellow comes and wants me to design him a shop in Oxford Street," he explained, "but he wouldn't employ me for long if I told him that I meant to sacrifice everything to the lighting of the shop itself. He doesn't want windows for the purpose of lighting his interior—he'd sooner not have too much light, because it fades his shoddy goods and shows 'em up for what they are. He wants windows for display. Give him nothing but windows on the ground floor and he'll fill 'em all up with goods so that it's too dark inside to see without gas on a summer midday. Also, he wants something rich and 'solid' by way of elevation, something to mislead the mind into imagining that his machine-made frippery is rich and solid, too. He doesn't want a shop, he wants a trap; and if I

don't give it him, he'll go somewhere else. Most modern town building is a sham, my boy, and you'd better make up your mind to it at once. Honesty's out of fashion—which means, incidentally, that you can't dare to be original. Look at that Birchester Art Gallery of mine, built of brick and veneered with stone to look like a Greek temple. 'One art gallery, complete in the classic style, with frescoes by Mallory, C.O.D.' That's my order, and I'm filling it."

John listened seriously to all Mr. Peterson's lectures, but his broad faith in the world's honesty, as a whole, was not shaken thereby. Mr. Peterson himself was being honest in making these admissions; and the kind of shams he talked about were not really important but just a kind of convention that every one accepted.

Since he had been articled to Mr. Peterson, John had had his ambitions toward honesty in architecture inflamed rather than damped by his principal's *obiter dicta* on this subject; because, if you came to that, Mr. Peterson himself was a crank, yet nobody could call him an honest fool. There was some fine distinction somewhere that had been overlooked, but neither John nor his two fellow-workers in the top-floor office in Great James Street could put a finger on the flaw.

Nicholas Soutar, the elder of his two companions, was an avowed skeptic and pessimist on all subjects. He agreed with his chief that there was no honesty remaining in the world, and that it was for the under dog to get up by any means in his power, even though he were forced in the struggle to disregard all the rules of fair play. To this he added that the upper dog must not

be blamed for keeping the struggler down to the best of his ability. If some one came behind and tried to pull you off a ladder, you kicked him in the face, if you could. For Soutar, the world was a cockpit, with the sneering gods as spectators. At least, so he said.

Cecil Phillips presumably disagreed entirely with this view of life, but he had no argument, logic being one of his weak points. He was a tall man—taller than John—thin and fair-haired with a drooping mustache; not a skilled draftsman, his place in the office economy being that of a tracer; not indeed skilled at his profession in any way, though he was a clever carpenter. Every one liked him, and whether or not from a sense of gratitude, he liked everybody in return. He and Soutar were great friends.

John liked them both, for different reasons. Soutar, who was his senior by fifteen years, he respected for his comprehensive knowledge of building construction, for his accurate drawing, and his shrewd hard judgments on the world in general. He, too, John found, was fundamentally honest, although the cynicism he paraded led him into over-statement, and prompted him to present his own character in the least attractive light. Phillips, John liked naturally, as did every one else who came in contact with him. He had the perfect sincerity of the simple, accepting all men without prejudice, listening to their opinions with earnest attention and attempting no refutation. His most emphatic protest when Soutar was more pessimistic than usual, was a cheerful "Oh! Come off it, Nick." Yet, although Phillips appeared to be genuinely impressed by Sou-

tar's or any other cynical philosophy of life, in practise he seemed to give all humanity something rather more than the benefit of the doubt. He was so supremely trustful that no one could deceive him to his own hurt.

It was fortunate for John that he should find qualities that awakened respect and liking in these two men, for the three of them were to be companions during many long hours, six days a week, for several years.

To accept Mr. Peterson's sudden and rather surprising offer had been so obviously the right thing for John to do that the briefest of conferences with her whom he now called Aunt Minnie had decided the issue. The premium for his articles was to be merely nominal. Peterson had once more exhibited his fundamental honesty by acknowledging that he had a particular use for John's services. He was hoping to be given the work of designing a hotel in Boulogne contemplated by an English syndicate; and John's knowledge of French methods, to say nothing of his intimate acquaintance with French measures, might be very useful.

Aunt Minnie had thought the offer "providential," and John, accepting it in much the same spirit, had received the warm approval of the Mallorys and Aunt Caroline, who, once she had grasped the fact that he had not come to England merely for a holiday, had been quite willing that he should stay on permanently. The only discouragement he had received had been from Miss Ellis, "Do you think you will like it, Mr. Fortescue," she had said, "being shut up like that in an office, after being out-of-doors so much? And in

London, too? Don't you find it very cold after the South?"

John did find it cold, and he was certainly not attracted by an indoor life, but he wanted to stay in London; and had realized very clearly since he had seen the Mallorys that it would never do for him to get employment as a mason in England. Moreover, the profession of an architect attracted him; and at twenty he was not to be daunted by such minor disadvantages as climate or the necessity for working indoors.

"Oh! I don't know," was all his answer to Miss Ellis. "I'll get used to it, I suppose."

Miss Ellis looked doubtful, and said he would "feel the cold later."

John received a passing impression that she did not want him to stay at St. Edmund's Terrace. Perhaps she was jealous; afraid of his obtaining some sort of ascendency over Aunt Caroline, who now depended for everything upon her companion. An odd woman, John thought, hard and self-contained; but Aunt Caroline evidently had a great admiration for her, trusted her with everything, and appeared to like being told exactly what she was to do.

The office was between two and three miles from St. Edmund's Terrace, but John walked there and back every day. It was the only exercise he could get on week-days. In the morning he always crossed the park, going by the Zoological Gardens and down the Broad Walk, then along the Euston Road to Gower Street; after that he zigzagged through the Bloomsbury squares to come out at one end or the other of Great

James Street. Returning in the evening, when he was not pressed for time, he continually varied his route; sometimes promenading the length of Oxford Street, at others striking north to King's Cross and investigating all the possible roads through the dreary wilderness of streets between the Euston Road and Camden Town. Within a couple of months he had an intimate knowledge of the whole tract of London lying south and west of St. John's Wood as far as Oxford Street and the Gray's Inn Road.

He enjoyed those walks whatever the weather. Sometimes he gave his thoughts to building construction, at others to observation of the life about him, occasionally to dreams. The old boyish game of pretending to be some one other than he actually was, had not altogether lost its attraction for him; and now and again he found pleasure in imagining himself to be a Frenchman with no knowledge of the English language.

One day this game brought him a new acquaintance. He was playing it when, as he crossed Russell Square, he saw what he immediately guessed to be a real Frenchman coming toward him, and stopping him with a polite inquiry as to his direction, was acclaimed as a fellow-countryman. John, anticipating detection of his fraud, and unable to continue his game when it involved deceit of any one but himself (to do that was too perilously like playing those other contemptible games that his father had indulged in), immediately confessed his deception with an apology.

"But it is so agreeable to speak French again," he added by way of explanation.

Monsieur Failly, his new acquaintance, seemed to find it "agreeable" also. He had, he told John, been only two weeks in London, and at present knew but one other Frenchman in town, a senior accountant in the bank in which he was working, and not sympathetic. Would not John meet him sometimes in the evening? He was living in a boarding-house in Montague Street, half-full of Germans, whom he detested by instinct.

John agreed willingly, and after that they met each other fairly regularly for a time. Monsieur Failly came from Tours, and John learned from him what his own French lacked. "You have a strong Provençal accent," he was told. "You should cure yourself of that. It is very ugly." And John tried hard, improving his accent and adding to his vocabulary. In return he helped Failly with his English, which was very bad indeed.

By the beginning of December, John had settled down into his new groove, working hard and improving rapidly with his mechanical drawing under Soutar's friendly instruction, though still apt in moments of forgetfulness to calculate ten inches to the foot. He had as yet no sense of monotony in his way of life, chiefly, perhaps, because he was living always in expectation of a longed-for event. At Christmas Edward and Viva would be home for the holidays; and he was counting the days to that time with all a schoolboy's eagerness. Ever since that afternoon at the Mallorys', when he had seen Viva's portrait and heard of her wish to have it destroyed, he had hugged to himself a warm certainty that he and she would understand each other.

But before the great day of her home-coming was

due, the routine of St. Edmund's Terrace was upset in quite another way.

The trouble began, so far as John was concerned, when he returned home one evening to find Aunt Caroline doing her best to bear up under misfortune. Miss Ellis had received an urgent telegram at ten o'clock that morning from Birmingham, summoning her to the death-bed of her mother, and had left by the midday train.

"Ellen has been very good and *most* useful," Miss Fortescue said; "but, of course, it's not quite the same thing. And, naturally, she won't be able to read to me in the evenings."

"But I will, aunt," John instantly volunteered. "I'd like to. I can't read anything like as well as Miss Ellis, but I'll improve with practise, I suspect; and it will be frightfully good for my English."

"That's very kind indeed of you, John," Miss Fortescut said; adding on reflection, "Though I hope, in some ways, that you won't have very much practise. I should scarcely think Laura would be away for more than a fortnight, would you?"

John professed a great hopefulness.

"She did not actually read me the telegram," Miss Fortescue explained; "but I gathered that her mother was dying, poor thing. I trust that it isn't very wicked, if she is really dying, to hope that her sufferings may not be too prolonged?"

Miss Fortescue was always read to in bed. The reading helped to compose her mind and gradually to induce sleep in the early hours of the night. "Because," as she

explained, "if I can once get to sleep, I am all right; but if I begin to toss, I'm as likely as not to lie awake till three in the morning."

John had not been in Aunt Caroline's bedroom since he returned, and the first object that caught his eye was the sheeted frame of the old tapestry that used to stand in the drawing-room.

"Oh! I say, there's Joshua," he exclaimed impetuously. "I suppose you didn't finish it?"

Miss Fortescue, lying on her back in a white night-cap and pink flannel dressing-jacket, with her arms laid out on the coverlet and a complete effect of composing herself to await the coming of sleep, sighed heavily.

"No, John. It will never be finished now," she said. "Poor Lizzie had very little time to work on it, after I lost my sight. There was still a lot of the horse to do when she died, I believe."

John tried to be cheerful. "I wonder if I could get on with it at odd times," he suggested. "I know how, you know, from watching you and Aunt Lizzie in the old days."

"Hardly a man's work," Miss Fortescue replied with a faint touch of asperity, and closed the subject by continuing: "We are reading *The Old Curiosity Shop*. I greatly admire Charles Dickens's works. You will find the book on the night-table, with the place marked; but I am not sure whether we were at the end of a chapter or not. The last I remember was something about Quilp."

But for a page or two John found a great difficulty

in keeping his attention on the delinquencies of Quilp. The sight of the tapestry had aroused all kinds of dormant associations; and the memories clustered about them fluttered up into his mind in a series of bright engaging pictures that had some attractive quality of real unreality, like the revived experiences of a remembered dream. And at the back of them all, he was aware of a vague—and perfectly absurd—sense of responsibility, as if it were his duty, now, to finish that long-delayed work; as if until it were all done he would for ever be conscious of something very important that he had neglected. Some time, he decided, he would measure up all that remained to be done, and calculate how long it would take him if he could do, say, fifty square centimeters a week.

"Perhaps, if you read a little more slowly, John," Aunt Caroline gently remonstrated, as he stumbled over passages the sense of which he had not grasped.

After that, he pulled himself together and presently became interested in the story, which was new to him.

It was nearly half past ten when he realized that his object had been achieved, and that Aunt Caroline was asleep. He turned out the gas, then, as he had been instructed, and went out on tiptoe, leaving a night-light burning in the wash-basin. Ellen was sleeping in Miss Ellis's room, while she was away, in case Miss Fortescue should want anything in the night.

There was no letter from Miss Ellis next day, but she had no doubt been too busy to write "in that house of sickness," as Miss Fortescue said; and it was not until two more days had passed without any word from her

absent companion that she began to harp upon this failure to send any news. What was so worrying, she explained, was that Laura had left no address to which one could write one's self. She had gone off so very suddenly. Indeed, Miss Fortescue had not realized very clearly before the telegram came that Laura's mother was still alive. She had never spoken of her, to the best of Miss Fortescue's remembrance.

By Sunday night, five days after Miss Ellis's departure, John was finding it more and more difficult to invent plausible reasons for her strange silence. After picturing various distresses in the Birmingham household to which she had been called, he was inclined to fall back upon the probability of her letter having been lost in the post. As it was Sunday, Dickens had not been brought out that evening, and after a chapter or two of the Bible, there was altogether too much time for conversation.

"The chances are that she'll turn up, herself, some time to-morrow evening," was his last effort to find consolation.

"It seems to me very strange, very strange, indeed," Aunt Caroline persisted. "I know I shan't get a wink of sleep to-night. If it had been only a post-card . . . It wouldn't have taken her two minutes to send off a post-card."

Another of John's new duties was to read his aunt's letters to her, but there was no post at all Monday morning, and on Tuesday nothing save a letter from the bank, calling Miss Fortescue's attention to a "previous communication with reference to the overdraft."

John read this out cheerfully enough; as a matter of very small importance compared with Miss Ellis's week-old silence. But Miss Fortescue appeared to take the matter more seriously.

"Did you say their previous communication, John?" she inquired anxiously. "But I've had no previous communication."

"Another letter lost in the post," John suggested.

Miss Fortescue shook her head. "I'm sure," she said, "that I have never had an overdraft. Why should I?"

"They've made a mistake, I suspect," John reassured her; "sent the letter to the wrong person. I'd better write to them."

Miss Fortescue was taking her breakfast in bed while Miss Ellis was away, as Ellen was really too busy, first thing, to help her mistress with her dressing; and John was ready to start for the office. Aunt Caroline detained him with a gesture of appeal.

"Are you quite sure you've made no mistake, John?" she asked.

John returned to the bedside and reread the letter. "That's plain enough," he said. "It's the bank that has made the mistake."

Miss Fortescue's hands, resting on the counterpane, were visibly trembling.

"I wish you would just go round and see them," she murmured.

John was taken aback. "They won't be open till ten, will they?" he asked.

"Ten, I think," Miss Fortescue replied, still in a very weak voice. "It isn't far, you know. In the High

Street. I really don't think I could get through the day if I didn't know."

John thought she was making a most unnecessary fuss about so small a matter, but she was obviously distressed, and it would not be a matter of very great importance if he were an hour or two late at the office.

"Very well, aunt," he said. "I'll go round as soon as they're open."

"You're very good, John," Miss Fortescue replied, and added incomprehensively, "God in His great mercy must have sent you to me in this hour of trial."

But old ladies were rather incomprehensible creatures, and Aunt Caroline, being blind, was no doubt particularly apt to take trifles too seriously.

He had a whole hour to wait before the bank would be open. He took the bank's letter in his pocket and used it by way of an introduction when he demanded an immediate interview with the manager. The St. John's Wood branch of the London and County was a very small affair. The solitary clerk looked doubtfully at his big visitor, and deciding apparently that it was unsafe to leave him alone there, he called to his manager without moving from his guard of the brass grille.

There was a moment's silence before the manager appeared at the inner door of his little office and glanced inquiringly at John.

"Oh! I'm Miss Fortescue's nephew. I'm living with her, and her secretary is away . . ." he began eagerly.

"Miss Ellis," the manager put in gravely, disappeared and then re-presented himself at another door giving access to his office from the public side of the

counter. "Will you step this way, Mr.—er . . .?" he inquired.

"Fortescue," John prompted him. "She is my father's sister, you know."

The manager bowed. He was a stolid-looking man of thirty-five or so, with an immensely deliberate, serious manner.

"You wished to see me?" was his carefully defensive opening when John was seated.

John explained at length while the manager listened with the grave half-abstracted air of a specialist attending to his patient's symptoms. At the conclusion of John's statement he rose, opened the inner door of his room, and addressing his solitary clerk, said: "Will you give me a note of Miss Caroline Fortescue's overdraft, Mr. Simpson?" Then reseating himself, he looked firmly at John, and remarked that the weather was not so seasonable as one could wish.

"Cold enough for me," John replied. "I've been living in the south of France for the last five years."

"Warmer there?" the manager asked, and maintained the conversation at that level until Mr. Simpson entered and laid a slip of paper on his desk.

"Two hundred and forty-seven pounds, seventeen and four pence," he announced gravely.

"Overdraft?" John expostulated.

"Overdraft."

"But my aunt said that she could not possibly have any overdraft; why should she?"

"She has drawn some very heavy checks recently," the manager said. "A check for two hundred pounds

last Monday week, if my memory serves me rightly. May I ask if Miss Ellis is away?"

"She has been away for just a week," John explained. "Her mother is dying—or dead, perhaps. We haven't heard from her since she went."

The manager began to figure on the slip of paper containing the note of the overdraft.

"Your aunt is blind?" he commented.

"Yes," John agreed.

"But she still signs her own checks, although the body has for more than a year been filled in by Miss Ellis."

"Oh!" John blandly accepted this piece of information without realizing its application to the case under discussion. The manager, after regarding him silently for a moment with his solid defensive stare, again rose and spoke to his subordinate.

"We have Miss Fortescue's pass-book?" he asked. "Ah! then kindly make it up, and let me have it as soon as possible."

"You had better go through it with your aunt, Mr. Fortescue," he said to John, resuming his seat. "She will doubtless remember the amounts of her recent checks. A very interesting country, the south of France, I am told."

When, after a further ten minutes of polite conversation, John received the pass-book, he asked no further questions but made all haste to get away. When he was outside the bank he began to run, and it was while he was running that the first suspicion of the truth broke upon him. He slackened his pace to a brisk walk, to a slower walk, finally, as he approached St. Edmund's

Terrace, to a dead stop. There was, he knew, every reason why he should believe this horrible thing. Mr. Peterson and Soutar had prepared him to the best of their ability to expect dishonesty in the world. But one did not expect to find criminal dishonesty among one's intimate and trusted acquaintances; nor in a too-plump, tightly-laced, freckled woman of thirty-five or so, the trusted—and loved—companion of a blind aunt. No! There must be some other explanation.

He found Miss Fortescue dressed and sitting by the fire in the drawing-room, with her hands in her lap; and it came to him with a sudden feeling of intense sympathy that throughout these long lonely days of hers, she had not even the distraction of looking into the fire by which she sat.

"There must be some mistake, aunt," he began. "I've brought your pass-book back with me. We'll go through it together. Do you remember, to begin with, signing a check for two hundred pounds last Monday week?"

Miss Fortescue made no reply to that. "How much is the overdraft, John?" she asked; and when he had told her the amount, let her head droop forlornly on her breast. "I'm sure I don't know what I shall do without her," was all the reproach Miss Ellis received from her bereaved employer.

Fortunately, Miss Fortescue had not been robbed on the grand scale. All her share certificates were in the keeping of her lawyer. But so far as John could figure it out from one or two casual remarks his aunt let fall, Miss Ellis must have got away with the best part of a thousand pounds.

But the infamous Miss Ellis was an exception; one

of those people—although he had been too stupid to recognize it until it was too late—of whom one reads in the police-case reports. It did not follow that Mr. Peterson and Soutar were justified in saying that dishonesty was the rule, and straight dealing confined to a few rare individuals.

CHAPTER XII

THE PORTRAIT

EDWARD came home two days before Viva. After the first genial hand-clasp he and John found themselves strangers to each other.

"By jove, you have altered," Edward said.

"So've you," was John's more timid answer.

They were both justified, although for different reasons. Edward's comment was natural, even obvious. John had changed in appearance almost beyond recognition; but in essentials, he had altered less than the other. Edward, who outwardly presented but an older version of the schoolboy, so nearly identical that the difference in him seemed to be almost entirely one of size, had, after four terms at Oxford, become a man of the world; achieved, in effect, his final transformation. John had recognized at once that they were no longer truly contemporaries. He, himself, was still growing; and his youth instinctively paid a tribute of reverence to the adult.

"You're going in for architecture, aren't you? The pater told me," Edward continued, to cover the awkwardness arising from the recognition that they must talk to each other across some difficult barrier of class and development. "Do you like it?"

"Very much," John replied. "I'm articled to Mr. Peterson. You know him, I suspect."

Edward shook his head. "What do you have to do?" he asked. "Design houses and that sort of thing?"

"That sort of thing," John agreed.

He felt clumsy under Edward's stare; conscious that his clothes were being criticized. He had come in at six o'clock on his way back from the office, full of a naïf eagerness to greet his old chum. He had never contemplated the possibility that Edward might have so completely grown up in those five years. As he had pictured the conversation, John had imagined them reviving memories of the old days at St. Paul's; comparing notes of their experiences since they had parted; but in the presence of this cultured and elegant man of the world all such boyish confidences appeared childishly foolish.

"How did you like living in France?" Edward continued, still with that faint air of trying to overlook the differences between them by assuming John to be on his own level.

"All right," John mumbled. "Jolly climate, of course."

"Yes," Edward agreed. "There's a notion about of my going to the continent for a year or so when I come down; to broaden my mind, and that sort of thing. The trouble is that I'm such a perfect ass at languages. I suppose you speak French like a native?"

"Practically," John admitted, and then afraid of the boastful sound of that statement, sought to belittle it by explaining; "I was three years, nearly, at a French school, you see, and after that, for the last two years,

till I came home last September, I scarcely spoke a word of English. Besides, I got used to the sound of French as a boy, you know, with my father."

Edward's expression stiffened slightly. "He hasn't come home yet?" he inquired.

"Oh! no. He won't—ever," John said. "He prefers the South. Well, I must get on. My aunt's rather dependent on me since her companion went. Thought I'd just like to see you."

"Rather. And I expect we'll see quite a lot of each other," Edward replied. "Hardly going anywhere this vac. I shall be home practically all the time."

John shook hands with him again, but afterward he realized that Edward had not expected it. He had responded at once, but with a look of faintly amused surprise.

Pondering these new relations between Edward and himself, John saw that this was a friendship he could never again renew. There was, indeed, a real barrier between them, unnoticed apparently by the rest of the family, but of importance to the well-connected Edward. How could there be any real intimacy between the son of Sir Vincent Mallory, R.A., whose father had been dean of some cathedral, and the son of that little scoundrel, married to a *femme de chambre* of peasant origin, who kept a stationer's shop at Nice.

Perhaps Viva, when she came home, would also make him conscious of that difference in their social standing.

He made no mention either of his disappointment or his anxiety at St. Edmund's Terrace. Aunt Minnie had come to stay with them for a time, nominally until

some one could be found to replace Miss Ellis; and if Aunt Caroline hesitated in her present attitude, that might mean until she died. Her confidence had been shaken. She felt that she could never again trust anything to strangers. Her blindness had come too late in life for any developing compensation of other faculties. She was still clumsy in finding her way about that familiar house and untidy in her feeding. And whatever faith she may once have had in her intuitions with regard to the now invisible world around her, had been enfeebled by her misjudgment of Miss Ellis.

"I don't know how I could have been so deceived in her," she constantly repeated with an effect of still trying to justify her belief in the character of the faithless Laura.

John and Aunt Minnie agreed that the finding of a new companion was going to be a difficult business. John was glad; but Aunt Minnie was not. She missed the quiet and seclusion of her flat; and she had so little leisure for writing at St. Edmund's Terrace, which was moreover inhabited for her by associations that she wanted to forget.

"We must find some one if we can, John," she said. "But you will have to be her secretary in future. We must take no risks with her money affairs after this."

John agreed willingly to act as secretary, and he was ready also to go on with the evening reading; or to do anything else he could to keep Aunt Minnie in the house. It made all the difference having her there.

Christmas Day was on a Wednesday that year. Viva came home on the preceding Saturday, but John did not

take the very first opportunity of seeing her as he had in the case of Edward. Indeed, he carefully avoided passing the Mallorys' house that day, although he spent a fruitless hour after lunch peering down into their garden. He could see it more clearly now that the leaves were off the trees.

Sunday morning found him still undecided. He would have liked some reasonable excuse for going to the Mallorys', but could think of none that was not altogether too transparent. That meeting with Edward had made him self-conscious. He was suddenly aware of the nakedness of his pretensions to meet the Mallorys on equal terms, and tried to pretend to himself that he would have had the same reluctance if Viva had not been there.

Nevertheless, he knew perfectly well that it was the fact of having a definite object in going that made all the difference; it was almost as if he were asking to be accepted on a new footing.

It was not until after midday dinner that he thought of a possible ambush. If Aunt Minnie would come with him, he might hide behind her. The Mallorys had said they would like to see her again, but she had never gone.

"I suppose you would not care to go and see the Mallorys with me this afternoon?" he began, trying not to feel awkward. Miss Fortescue was "resting" in her own room, there was little else she could do when she was not being actively entertained—and Aunt Minnie had just suggested that they should go for "a little walk."

"I don't know that I should, John," she replied firmly.

"But why not?" he protested. "They've told me once or twice how much they'd like to see you again."

"Oh! yes; they're very charming people," she said carelessly.

"Well, then, why not?" he persisted, adding: "They know, you know; about father and all that."

"Precisely," she commented.

"But if they don't mind . . ."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't?"

"Don't see why you should," John grumbled.

"I dare say it's very silly," she admitted in the tone of one who defends a personal weakness.

"I wish you would," he urged her.

She looked up at him with a new interest. "But why?" she asked. "Why to-day, more particularly? Why don't you go alone? I can spare you very well, if that's what you're thinking of."

"No. It wasn't that," he mumbled reluctantly.

"What then?" She was still watching him, and he turned away and walked over to the window.

It was just here that he had stood on that last day in St. Edmund's Terrace when he had come to say good-by to the aunts; and he was conscious again of the same sense of impatience, of a longing to get something done and start afresh. But if he told her of how Edward had greeted him, he would increase her reluctance. Besides, that was but a very small part of it. The truth was that he was afraid to meet Viva, afraid that she might think he had come on purpose to see her. He wanted, some-

how—he did not know how to put it even in his thoughts—to meet her "fairly"; so that she would not have to be polite.

"Can't go for a walk, anyway," was all he said. "It's beginning to rain."

There were a few moments' silence before she continued: "You haven't told me yet why you want me to go with you, to-day, more particularly."

"Oh! I don't know," he mumbled. He had a queer sensation of being still fifteen.

"Viva's at home, isn't she?"

"I suspect so. She was to have come home yesterday."

He knew she was looking at him, but he simply could not meet her eyes.

"Oh! very well, I'll come," she volunteered unexpectedly. "What time do they have tea?"

"Five o'clock. I say, it's frightfully good of you. You're sure you don't mind?" John said.

"I don't know why I should," she returned.

The Mallorys' drawing-room seemed to be full of people when they were announced. John had not known that there was to be a kind of informal "private view" of the portrait of Viva, and did not realize that all these visitors had come ostensibly for a special purpose until Lady Mallory explained the reason for the crowd on a note of apology. She was, John thought, more charming even than usual in her reception of Aunt Minnie, who was curiously stiff and distant in her replies. He could not see why she should be so reserved and formal after she had been so warmly welcomed.

The portrait was hung rather high on the wall, and lighted by a cluster of candles in sconces on either side. John had hardly looked at it since his first critical inspection, and found it now more irritating than ever.

Sir Vincent, who had been keeping modestly in the background and receiving the deluge of compliments that was poured upon him with a smile and a deprecatory wave of his hand, came over to them almost at once and said how delighted he was to see Mrs. Fortescue again. "We are great readers of your books in this house," he told her. "We don't get our 'Mary Gordons' from the library; we buy them to keep."

Aunt Minnie thawed a little then. "I wish I could buy your pictures to keep, Sir Vincent," she said, smiling; "and more particularly this one. But where is the original? I don't see her anywhere."

"She said she simply couldn't bear it," Lady Mallory explained. "Very natural, of course, at her age."

"Yes, thank heaven, she's not in the least vain," Sir Vincent added.

"Though she certainly has enough reason to be," Aunt Minnie commented thoughtfully, looking up at the portrait. "One doesn't need to be told what a marvelous likeness it is."

"Near enough. In a certain mood," Sir Vincent said. "But I might paint her every week, and find a new interpretation of her every time. However, she has refused to sit to me again."

After that Lady Mallory insisted on their having tea, which was set out at the other end of the long double

drawing-room; and Edward, Helen and Jane, in turn, all came and greeted Aunt Minnie as if she were a person whom they were glad to know. Helen particularly, who was tall and dark, and had a rather plain but very intellectual face, obviously said very much the right things about Aunt Minnie's books.

They stayed only about half an hour, but Aunt Minnie was begged to come again "when there wasn't such a terrible crowd"; and she seemed, by then, to have quite got over her first uncomfortable stiffness.

John had a feeling of elation, as if he had had a personal triumph. He was immensely proud both of Aunt Minnie and the Mallorys; and believed, now, that he would no longer mind going in, the next day perhaps, on purpose to see Viva. This successful visit seemed to have given him some sort of standing again.

They were descending the stairs when he heard his name called from the second-floor landing. "Hello, John!"

He turned and looked up. "Hello, Viva!" he replied in the same tone.

"How do you do, Mrs. Fortescue," Viva continued. "Have you been to look at IT?"

"I rather fancy it was you we came to see," Aunt Minnie said.

"Oh! well, come again, soon," Viva returned, waved her hand to them and disappeared.

"You ought to be flattered, John," Aunt Minnie remarked as soon as they were outside the front door. "I suppose Miss Viva was waiting there especially to see you, wasn't she?"

"Oh, no! Rather not," John replied vehemently. "I suspect she had been watching all the people coming and going. Must have been. There's no earthly reason, I mean, why she should want to see me especially. She was only ten the last time I saw her."

He did not know why, but he felt it to be absolutely essential to deny the possibility of Viva's having wanted to see him again. He could not dare to hope as much as that himself, and wanted passionately to defend her from such a charge.

"Well, she knew you again from your back," Aunt Minnie said with a smile; "and that in spite of the fact that it has grown so much broader."

"Oh! it must have been *you* that she recognized," John returned. "You haven't altered a scrap; unless it is that you look rather younger than you used to, five years ago." He felt strangely bold just then. Never before had he come so near to paying her a compliment. But for some reason it did not seem to matter now. He was so happy and so confident that he could have said anything to anybody—almost.

Aunt Minnie was still smiling, but she said nothing.

"Anyhow, you're glad you went, aren't you?" he continued.

"Yes; they are nice people," she agreed.

"And you'll go again, won't you, when there isn't such a crowd, as Lady Mallory said?"

"Perhaps. We'll see," she answered, adding: "Though I don't see what you want me for."

"Oh! but I do. Rather," he assured her. "It makes no end of difference."

She did not press him for any further explanation.

John's feeling of elation remained with him for the rest of the day. He had constantly to check his desire to whistle, that being his only musical gift, but one that he had developed to an unusual extent. His whistling was always very true, he had a good ear and memory—he could whistle softly, while executing elaborate runs and trills with a fascinating precision and delicacy. Soutar had told him that if all else failed, he could make a living as a whistler, either on the stage or in the streets. But he had to suppress that talent of his in Aunt Caroline's house because she was tone deaf, and the sound worried her.

"Just like a canary," she used to say in the old days. "I never liked sitting in a room with a singing canary."

He was glad to be alone in his own room, where the only need for restraint was that of keeping his music piano. He pretended to read, but that evening there were but two words in any language of any real interest to him, "Hello, John!" said just as he had heard them that afternoon hailing him, reminding him of something that had never happened, acclaiming him as the old friend and companion he had never thought of being until he had met her again in her mother's drawing-room three months ago, and shared her silent protest. It was as if she had known what he had been thinking and feeling.

He had, no doubt, been included in the invitation to "come again, soon," but the next day he would be at the office until half past five, and there was no excuse for turning up at the Mallorys' at six o'clock, as there had

been when the disappointing Edward came home. But on Tuesday, Christmas Eve, he had a holiday, and might very well go around about tea-time.

The chief difficulty was how to spend the rest of the day. The sky had cleared on Monday evening, and there had been a rime frost in the night. The air was dry and exhilarating, and when the copper-colored sun rose above the threat of fog, the trees, all delightfully decorated for Christmas, seemed to have come straight from fairyland.

John found it impossible to stay in the house. He had not felt so thoroughly and gratefully English since he had come back from France. The Riviera might be all right in its own way, but it never made you feel full of fire and energy and joy as did this northern frost; nor with all its languorous beauties could it produce this effect of chaste and shining loveliness.

He decided to explore the familiar expanses of Regent's Park, and had made an almost complete tour at top speed, when, returning by the lake, he saw Jane and Viva Mallory coming toward him. He did not check his pace when he recognized them. Never in his life had he felt less shy.

"We came to see if there was any ice on the lake," Jane explained as he came up. "Isn't it nice having this weather for Christmas?"

They were both in furs and carrying muffs. It seemed so friendly and right that they should not offer to shake hands, but just accept him as some sort of nice relation.

"Jolly," he agreed, turning and walking beside them.

"Last year I had my Christmas dinner out-of-doors. On the pavement, at least."

"How lovely," Viva commented softly. She had given him one steady appraising glance when they met, rather as if she were seeking to confirm her memory of him, but now she was looking away toward the lake, skimmed here and there with a pale film of ice.

"But this is ripping, too," John said, and told them how peculiarly English he felt that morning, so braced and fervent and strong.

Jane agreed, but Viva did not appear to be listening, until she suddenly put in: "I hate the cold."

John felt a little checked. "But you get sick of the everlasting sunshine, you know," he said.

"I shouldn't," she returned. "I don't believe I could ever have enough of it. Real sunshine, not like this." She emphasized her point by a gesture toward the dim, almost invisible disk, nearly hidden behind the thickening bank of approaching fog.

"Oh! bother! The fog does spoil everything," Jane ejaculated.

But John was ready to welcome even that. It gave a touch of mystery and adventure to the civilized picturesqueness of the park. He imagined himself and his two companions overwhelmed in darkness, groping their way back through a country that had become suddenly strange and difficult.

"Perhaps we'd better be going home," Jane continued. "I suppose you never get fogs in France."

"Not on the Riviera," John said. "In Lyons, they do."

He and Jane found plenty to talk about, and Viva must have been listening with a certain amount of interest, for she presently put in: "How could you bear to come back and live in London after that?" There was, John thought, a hint of admiration in her reproach.

"Oh, there were a heap of reasons," he said. "Besides," he wanted to be perfectly honest, "really I don't mind a bit. I like living in London in lots of ways."

Viva appeared to be unconvinced.

It had grown very dark before they reached St. James's Terrace, but the fog was not thick enough to give John any excuse for losing his way; being merely one of those yellow acrid fogs with a taste of sulphur that reminded him of the smoke in the underground tunnel at Baker Street. He had not been down there again since.

"Well, if you prefer this sort of thing to too much sunshine," Viva said, with her hand to her throat, as they all paused together at the gate of the Mallorys' front garden.

John laughed. "No, I bar fogs," he agreed.

It was Jane who said, "Won't you come in to see us this afternoon? We shan't be able to go out again, if it goes on like this."

"Thanks, I'd love to. About four?" John replied eagerly.

He, Jane and Viva had tea alone together in the schoolroom on the second floor. There were "people" again down-stairs, only three, clerical relations of Sir Vincent, who were spending Christmas in town, but

sufficient excuse for the fun of making one's own tea in the schoolroom.

Afterward they played dominoes and the piano, not too loudly because of the "fogeys" in the drawing-room, and then John delighted the two girls by whistling *Il Baccio* to Jane's accompaniment.

Viva was in ecstasies. "Do do some more," she besought him. "I love it. Where did you learn?"

"Entirely self-taught, lady," John said, touching his forehead.

They were all being very merry together when Lady Mallory came in, to be hailed with a fervent description of John's accomplishment, which he had to display again for her benefit.

"Delightful," she agreed warmly, when he had finished, "I heard something down-stairs and thought it was a man in the street."

"It may come to that, yet," John said, with a grin.

In the years that followed he looked back with keen regret on his intimacy with the Mallory household during those Christmas holidays. He was accepted by all of them more as a kind of relation than as a mere friend. After that first meeting, Edward treated him as a rather amusing junior, gifted with a few queer, unusual talents that were worth a passing attention. He asked him questions in school French, and listened with an amused, uncomprehending grin to John's voluble replies. And there was a piece of dialogue, that John worked up those holidays, assumed to take place between an old Provençale peasant woman and an American tourist, which was a source of never-failing

laughter to every one. Even though they could understand but the American half of it.

John was more than content to be accepted on those terms. Those odd accomplishments of his developed unexpectedly in the warmth of this new appreciation. Until he came to practise it, he had not realized that his true musical ear brought with it a gift for mimicry. And the consciousness of being able to *do* something entertaining that others could not, gave him a feeling of self-reliance, of taking a reasonable part in the cultured clever society of the Mallorys and their famous friends.

He began to feel that in his humble way he was earning some sort of a right to the equality that had been so generously offered him.

With Viva he remained outwardly on exactly the same terms as with Jane; but inwardly he was aware of an incalculable difference. He liked Jane; he could meet her on equal terms; chaff her on occasion; between them there was an easy-going friendship very similar in kind to that which had once existed between him and Edward. But he was afraid of Viva; afraid of displeasing her, of appearing awkward in her presence; above all, afraid of assuming the least shade of intimacy that she might be unwilling to grant. When he tried to please her it was by an effect of humility; and when she sometimes playfully patronized him with a little queenly air of condescension, he felt rewarded beyond his deserts.

The end of the school holidays was less than a week ahead when the "awful thing" happened. For many

years afterward he was to remember it with a hot blush of shame as the "awful thing."

The affair began with an astonishing note that he found waiting for him on his return from the office: "DEAR JOHN,—Could you come round this evening after dinner? Ask for me.—VIVA." It was the first time he had been thus summoned to the Mallorys' house, and he began with the guess that they had some one coming in to see them and wanted him to whistle. Afterward, he improved this idea by positing that Viva was planning some surprise entertainment, into the secret of which he alone was to be admitted; thereby accounting for the queer request that he should ask for her.

He felt absurdly nervous and uneasy as he mounted the broad flight of stone steps up to the hall door. He always had an unpleasant feeling that Masters, the grave butler, did not quite approve of him; and was afraid that he might, now, regard with some displeasure the request for an interview with Miss Viva. If it had been Jane or Edward, it would have been different.

But he was spared that ordeal. The door mysteriously opened of itself as he approached it, and he found Viva, herself, awaiting him just inside the hall. She put her finger to her lips as he came in, shut the door with elaborate precautions against noise, and then preceded him on tiptoe up the stairs. The big drawing-room into which she led him was empty, but two of the three tall standard lamps were lighted, and there was a blazing fire in the further fireplace.

"Every one's out except me," she explained, speaking

in a low voice, as if she were still afraid of being overheard. "They've all gone to the theater. Sit down. I want to talk to you about something."

He was thrilled, but in a queer way frightened and uncomfortable. He had an odd longing for the reassuring presence of Jane. He did not feel equal to conducting the conversation creditably without her.

"Oh! What about?" was all he found to say.

"About that," Viva said, indicating by a sidewise jerk of her head the portrait of herself on the opposite wall.

"Oh, I see!" John replied, as if that explained everything. He was immensely relieved. What he had been afraid of, he had not dared even to ask himself; but it was certainly not this. His paralyzing shyness seemed suddenly to have left him. "I don't like it, you know. Not a bit," he continued. "It always makes me feel as if I wish to goodness you'd move or do something."

"Jane told me you didn't like it," she said, looking at him with a steady inquiring gaze, as if she were testing his quality. "I thought you'd say something to me about it, but you never did. I often wished you would."

"I didn't like to," he explained. "I knew you hated it, too, and I thought, perhaps, you'd sooner I didn't say anything."

"Daddy's going to show it in this year's Academy," Viva went on, disregarding his remark. "I've begged and begged him not to, but he doesn't take any notice, and"—her voice broke slightly, as if she were losing control of herself—"I simply can't bear it. I won't."

John was puzzled and his shyness was coming back

again. Why should she summon him to a secret meeting in order to tell him this? Sympathy seemed to be demanded, but he did not know how to offer it.

"Rotten luck, of course," he murmured gruffly.

"No one can ever understand how I feel about it," she continued rapidly, "and I don't know that I can explain exactly, even to you."

Even to him! The shock of that flattery slowly penetrated his whole being, so that for ever after he saw himself in a new light. This was the corroboration of that first greeting of hers, the intimate "Hello, John!" thrown to him with an air of establishing a friendship that had hitherto only existed secretly in their own minds. From that moment he was willing to do almost anything she asked him.

"I think I do understand, in a way," he said humbly.

"You see," she explained, "it *is* part of me, that portrait, but it's a part I don't like much. I don't know why, quite. Always going to do something, and never doing it. A particular sort of thing, I mean. And I never shall do it, either, while that portrait's there, because the moment I want to, I feel like the beastly thing and hate myself."

It was a terribly incoherent statement, but some comprehension of her meaning came to him as he listened, seeing in her pose and expression how at that very moment she approached the gesture of the portrait with its suggestion of an imminent action that could only be one of vehement protest.

"I see," he said, looking into the fire; "but what do you want to do?"

"Burn it," she replied, not with that air of defiance which would have given her words the emptiness of a child's boast, but almost in a whisper, confidingly, as one who confesses the impulse to heinous sin.

John did not move. He needed no further hint from her of what his part was to be in this horrible crime. She had not dared to act alone, and he was the only person in the whole world who could help her. Surely nothing that happened afterward could be strong enough to break the alliance of complicity that would henceforth bind them together.

"It isn't only being shown in the Academy," she hurried on, as if afraid of being condemned by his silence. "Really I wouldn't mind that. But think of the engravings! Thousands of them! Hundreds of thousands. Everywhere; being looked at by everybody. Perhaps used as an advertisement for soap or something . . ."

"Oh, no!" John broke in. "Sir Vincent would never allow that."

"He might! He might have to!" she returned passionately. "If a soap man wanted to buy it and gave him a lot of money. It might mean a lot of money, you know; and we're not so frightfully rich. Daddy's always saying he ought to save more than he does . . ."

John did not recognize the note of special pleading. He accepted anything she might say to him in this ultimate confidence, as true beyond all question.

"I'll never be able to come here again," he said.

"Not this holidays, perhaps," she replied quickly; "but they'll have to forgive you in the end. I'll make them. Oh! John, will you? You're so tall, you could

reach it if you stood on that table. It's quite strong. And you could cut it out of the frame if you have a knife—just the canvas, you know, or some of it; enough to spoil it—and then we could burn it here in the fire . . ."

The description of the crime made him tremble. He felt as some inexperienced burglar must surely feel when he first sets foot in the sacred house that he means to ravage. And worse, far worse, than that, because he would be betraying a precious and deeply valued confidence, committing an act of intolerable disloyalty to Lady Mallory and Sir Vincent; outraging the feelings of Helen and Edward, who would henceforward regard him with disgusted contempt. Only from Jane could he ever hope for forgiveness. She, he knew, would find excuses for him.

"Oh, Viva!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe I could."

She got to her feet and stood very erect by the mantelpiece. "All right," she said coldly. "Then I must do it, alone, somehow, that's all. I don't know why you should help me, really."

In a moment the sweet comradeship and understanding between them had vanished. He had been wonderfully chosen, and had proved himself unworthy. And even though he had to sacrifice the affection of Lady Mallory, the delightful intimacy with the rest of them, would not the gain be worth the immense sacrifice? He would lose the comforts of being liked and respected, but he would have won some kind of victory over his inclinations, he would be alone and powerful, a kind of Joshua, high above the world with his head in the

clouds that were so near to God, able in his magnificent isolation to disregard the opinions of the teeming struggling world down there in the valley of Ascalon. He and Viva. She only, would be able to join him in that land of bleak remote exile.

The vision flashed before him and faded, but the impression remained. This, it seemed to him at that moment, was the great thing: to risk condemnation, fight one's natural desires, brave the slights of the world. By that way, alone, could one truly win a measure of independence, of freedom.

"Very well, I'll do it," he said, standing up.

She knew nothing of the fantasy that had been working in his mind; and believing, no doubt, that all he was prepared to venture would be offered as a tribute of his admiration, was prepared at once to encourage and reward him.

"I did think you'd understand; and you do, don't you?" she said, holding out her hand to him. Something of the frankness had gone from her regard of him; her gaze met his for an instant and then dropped with a little flutter of embarrassment.

John, fumbling in the wrong pocket for his knife, affected to be unaware of any invitation. He did not want to touch her. She was, to him, a symbol of some vague ideal of the immaculate, rather than of embryonic womanhood. Even to take her hand with any gesture other than that of frank steady friendship might perilously recall the debased images associated with Isabelle, or the revolting fancies of Goudron.

"I'd better shift some of the things off that table,"

he mumbled, moving away from her across the room. "I might knock 'em over." He did not see her look of surprise, mingled with a passing suggestion of petulance.

The table was of mahogany, oblong, and carried on one massive pedestal, and John, with his trained sense of supports and resistances, knew that he must step directly to the center and remain standing there. The table might be strong, but it was not calculated to carry a weight of over twelve stone at any point other than that immediately over the pedestal. Also, he must find a cloth or cushion, something to interpose between his rough boots and that well-polished surface. He was about to commit an act of destruction on an immensely valuable piece of property; but the thought of damaging this table, however slightly, seemed to him an impossible outrage.

Viva, flushed now and excited, hovered about him, eagerly obeying his suggestions, fetching him a chair by which to mount, a little skin rug from the door for him to stand upon.

He had his workman's knife, reasonably sharp—he had eaten his dinner with it a hundred times in Nice—but standing in that poise, afraid lest the rug might slip away from him if he leaned to one side or shifted his foothold, and compelled, even now, to stretch his hands above his head to reach the top of the picture; he found it no easy task to rip the tough canvas. But after the first quick stab, the difficulties kept his mind away from the horror of what he was doing. He had a job to perform, and the resistances kept his attention

on the material task to the obliteration of its import. And half-way through, the top of the partly-severed canvas flopped forward so that the nature of the sacrilege was no longer apparent. The act of murder had given place to a mere autopsy.

Even when the last strand had been severed, they had still to burn the corpse, and already the first intimations of panic were upon them. It was with a fervor of desperation that John rolled and stamped upon the canvas to reduce it to such a compass as would permit of its being thrust partly up the chimney with its butt on the still brightly-glowing fire.

But once it had caught, it burned like a judgment; with an intimidating threatening roar of flame far up the chimney, a terrifying roar that seemed as if it would never cease till the whole house had been consumed. And not until that roar had died down, and little was left but a pillar of gray ash glowing here and there, and tottering toward collapse, did the accomplices look each other in the face; a shy furtive look that had nothing in it of triumph or accomplishment.

"Oh! John, I wish you hadn't done it," Viva said; all the thanks, all the intimation of the indissoluble bond that had been forged between them, that he was to receive just then.

Nor was he in any mood to receive recognition even from her at that moment. Though he kept control of himself, he was pricked by an intense desire to escape. "Too late, now," he replied with an effort. "We'd better put those things back."

"No, no," she said. "No. Please go, John. Go now,

quickly." She kept her head stiffly turned away from that horrid skeleton on the wall, and as she spoke took a couple of steps toward the door.

"But hadn't I better put things straight a bit?" John persisted foolishly, as if the disordered room added some extra weight of evidence against him.

She shook her head impatiently. Plainly all that she wanted now was that he should go. Her anxiety seemed to be centered about the disposal of the human element in the tragedy, while his mind played equally unmeaningly about the material.

"But, I say Viva," was his last protest as they stood together on the landing; "I can't leave you here alone. Hadn't I—hadn't I better—wait—till they come in?"

She was too panic-stricken to appreciate the greatness of his offer. "Oh, no! Oh, no!" she returned, already flying toward her room. "Go, now, quietly." Then she paused to look down and add: "They can't *do* anything, you know. They can't really *do* anything."

It was true that in a sense they could not *do* anything; John reflected, not in any positive way. They could not, for instance, imprison him. But they could, and would, exclude him from their house, cut him off from all the joy and satisfaction he had found there.

He had had a vision of some splendid isolation, but as he softly let the front door of the St. James's Terrace house click definitely behind him, he was aware only of shame and humiliation. He felt less like Joshua than the hare that crouched by his horse's feet, slinking from the notice of a world that completely overlooked its existence.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF A CHAPTER

AUNT MINNIE was still reading to Aunt Caroline when John came in. He heard the even flow of her rich voice going steadily on, with no hint in it as yet of the diminuendo that marked the coming of sleep to Miss Fortescue. He called his good night to them through the door. He did not want Aunt Minnie to see him until he had had time to recover his normal balance. He would be out of the house to-morrow morning before she was down, and by the evening . . .

But heaven only knew what might have happened before next evening. Would Sir Vincent come round and ask to see Aunt Minnie; or, a gentler envoy, Lady Mallory? More probably they would send a note. They might not find out anything until the morning. One of the maids would, perhaps, make the discovery? They might think the picture had been stolen? The most likely thing was that he would find a letter from Viva, or Jane, awaiting him when he got home from the office. Or they might leave a message asking to see him? Could there be any question of compensation? He had presumably done something that would be reckoned as a crime in the eyes of the law. Wilful destruction of valuable property! But they would never

prosecute him. He was not afraid of that. The chief point really was what would Viva tell them? Supposing she never told them that he had been to the house that evening?

All these speculations were quite useless, and he knew it, but he could not keep them away. After an hour or two, lying horribly broad awake in the darkness, something within him began to rebel against this endless consideration of grotesque and futile eventualities. He tried hard to divert his thoughts, but the instant the effort of concentration was relaxed the same weary round of suggestions thronged back. He found himself, again and again, in the midst of them, without knowing how or when they had returned.

He slipped suddenly into unconsciousness at last, without any preparatory sensation of drowsiness, and when he awoke was immensely surprised to hear Ellen moving about the house. He was free then from the tormenting round of surmises that had tortured him overnight, but he was aware of a horrible load of depression. The day held no hope of any joy for him.

There were short stretches of time at the office when his mind was no longer occupied with the thought of his crime, or dread of its consequence; but after these brief periods of absorption in his work, he would come out of his abstraction with an immense sense of returning to a world heavy with the threat of disaster. At five o'clock he was besieged by an impatience to know the worst, left the office early, and went home by the nearest route, running most of the way.

There was no note for him on the hall table, and

when, after waiting a couple of minutes to recover his breath and his composure, he went up to the drawing-room, Aunt Minnie looked up at him just as usual.

"Aren't you early to-night, John?" was all she said.

"Perhaps I am, a bit," he replied as carelessly as he could. There was no need to ask her any questions. If she had heard anything he would have known by her face, and she would be sure to tell him if there had been any message for him.

After a few minutes' desultory conversation he went up to his own room. From there he watched for a time all that he could see of the back of the Mallorys' house. Everything looked exactly as it always did. He had half expected to see some sign of commotion.

There was neither note nor message for him in the course of the evening. Nor all the next day.

The day after that was a Saturday, and John came home for lunch at half past one. Surely to-day, he thought, he would hear something. He decided to stay in the house all the afternoon in case Viva or Jane came round with a message. He had better go up to his own room and keep a look-out. If they saw him at his window, they might wave to him from the garden.

Miss Fortescue had gone up to lie down, and he was mentally trying over an excuse to get out of the drawing-room, when Aunt Minnie said, "Aren't you going to see your friends, the Mallorys, this afternoon? You seem to have dropped them for the last two days."

"Oh! I don't know; perhaps, I might," he said.

"What has happened, John?" Aunt Minnie asked quietly.

"Happened?" he repeated, his surprise and confu-

sion clear to the feeblest observer. "How do you mean 'happened'?"

"As if I couldn't see," she said. "You don't mean to tell me that something didn't happen when you were there on Wednesday evening? You've been quite different ever since. So miserable, and what I can't understand, as if you were rather scared of something."

He gave up any further attempt at secrecy, then. He had meant to say nothing to her, but his need for a confidante was very great, and no question of loyalty to Viva was involved. What he and she had done that night could be no secret in the Mallorys' house.

He blundered horribly over his confession, but by degrees all the bare facts were stated. He made no attempt to defend himself; indeed, he so far omitted the essential explanation of motive from his account that Aunt Minnie's first comment was:

"But *why* did you, John? I can't understand *why* you destroyed the picture."

"I hardly know myself, now," he said.

His reply completely missed the purport of the question that had been put to him, but it was true in effect. Looking back on that evening he found it difficult to believe that it was really he, himself, who had had the queer vision of Joshua which had seemed to promise him some satisfaction in his crime; a promise that had certainly not, so far, been kept.

"Are you in love with Viva?" Aunt Minnie pressed him.

"I don't think so," he replied deliberately, and without confusion.

"Has she flirted with you?"

It was a horrible question that he would have liked to deny with vehemence; but he was haunted by the remembrance of Viva's outstretched hand and averted eyes at the moment of his agreement to help her. Had she, then, been ready to "flirt" with him? Abominable word.

"I've never so much as touched her hand," he said.

"But then, John, whatever made you do such a terrible thing?" Aunt Minnie remonstrated.

"Well, one thing was that it seemed to me so ghastly to think of that picture being engraved and copies of it sold to just any one who cared to buy it," he explained.

"Oh! You are in love with her, John; even if you don't know it yourself," Aunt Minnie said. "But I'm afraid you've rather spoiled your chances, now."

"I can't make out why I haven't heard anything from them," he complained, avoiding that issue.

"No? But, my dear boy, surely you don't expect to, do you?" she asked. "They're not the kind of people to make a fuss. All the same I don't see how you can ever hope to go to their house again."

But still he cherished the hope that Viva would write to him; and it was not until Tuesday evening, the day before she was, as he supposed, returning to Cheltenham, that this hope died out, and he determined to make one desperate bid for forgiveness. What he should say he did not know; but he finally persuaded himself that his explanation would be made to Lady Mallory or Jane. And it might be, despite this horrible ominous silence, that Viva had stood up for him, found excuses for him—perhaps too eagerly?

He said nothing to Aunt Minnie of his intention. She would almost certainly try to dissuade him from going, and although he had quite made up his mind, he did not want to have to defend his motives in advance. He would tell her about his visit afterward—whatever happened.

He waited until the night's reading had begun at a quarter to nine and let himself out quietly. He was not nervous. Now that the ordeal was so near, a sense of power and command, of being impervious to all harm, had come to him. The worst that could happen would be his total rejection by the Mallorys, and he risked that even more dangerously if he did not see them.

The first check to the self-confidence that was upholding him, came when he saw the whole front of the St. James's Terrace house blank and deserted; the one glimmer of light, a mournful yellow window in the basement. After he had rung the bell, he seemed to stand for long minutes in a dreary silence before he heard the sound of steps in the hall, followed by a tortuous unbarring of the door, chained, bolted and locked as if they would keep him out by force. And it was not the grave Masters who opened to him at last, but an unknown man in shirt-sleeves.

"Is Sir Vincent . . ." John began.

"Gorne abroad," the man interrupted him. "Fer some munse."

"Rather sudden, wasn't it?" John asked.

"Well, yes, it was as you might say rather sudden," was the reply. "Me and my missus is the caretakers. Reglar job of ours, off-an-on."

"Do you know where they've gone?"

"Perris for a start. Afterward the Reveerer. We forward letters. Leastways, the missus does."

"Oh! well, thank you," John said. "Sorry to have given you the trouble of coming up."

"No trouble, thank *you,* sir," the caretaker replied. "Part of our job. There's been a mort o' callers one way 'n' another."

After that John's life began to settle into a rut. The sense of shame in his act of destruction left him by degrees. He was young and plastic enough to grow out of it. For some months the thought of it would come back now and again with a sudden shock, as the recollection of a gross misdemeanor that brought the hot blood to his face. But the shock continually decreased until the spiritual wound was no longer sensitive to the touch, until he could find excuses for the boy he had been when the crime was committed, shrug his shoulders, and shake his head with a smile of reproof for the vagaries of his eager youth. By then he had come to believe that Sir Vincent and Lady Mallory had been unnecessarily hard upon him, that they might have been more tolerant toward his inexperience.

They came back to London at the end of April. Two or three times that summer John just caught sight of Sir Vincent in the park, and once he saw Lady Mallory and Helen in the garden from his bedroom window. But although they were such near neighbors it was easy to avoid meeting them, and he never actually passed the St. James's Terrace house. His desire to "have it out with them" had vanished then; and the following

autumn they gave up the house and went away altogether. John had heard them discussing the advantages of living "on the other side of the park" in the "old days," before Viva came home; and he presumed that that plan had matured, and taken them to South Kensington.

It was, on the whole, a relief when they went. All that was left to John, then, was a little ache of regret for the pleasures of that one Christmas holiday.

The next disaster that was to have its effect in sinking him a little deeper into the rut was the desertion of Aunt Minnie. Another companion had been found for Miss Fortescue, a timid little gray-haired lady, extremely anxious to please; who, if she had a fault, was almost too trustworthy; and Aunt Minnie, with a sigh of relief, returned to her old flat.

That was to be expected, and John found some compensation in the half-apologetic explanation she gave him, and her promise that they should see each other constantly. By way of earnest, she gave him a perpetual invitation to lunch with her every Sunday.

It was not until the summer of 1891, eight months after the destruction of the portrait, that the real threat of her desertion overtook him.

Mr. Peterson's commission for the building of the Boulogne hotel had matured, as did the majority of his plans, and for a time John, in receipt of a small salary and all his expenses, spent quite a large proportion of his time on the French works. He had protested against the salary, as he was still in his articles, but Mr. Peterson, once again demonstrating the fundamental hon-

esty he had disclaimed, had curtly told him not to be a fool.

The work was nearing completion that August, so far as the construction of the shell was concerned, and for three consecutive week-ends John did not come home. And when, after this long absence, he arrived at Aunt Minnie's flat for Sunday lunch, he was greatly disappointed to find another visitor there.

He was a tall handsome man of between fifty and sixty, and John's first impression was of his unusual coloring. His hair, mustache and eyebrows were so astonishingly black and white; the jet black and the vividly white hairs nowhere blending to produce an effect of gray. He had a very slight American accent, was obviously a cultured man of the world, and the editor, as John was soon to learn, of a very high-class American review published in Boston. It was through his editorship that he had come to make the acquaintance of "Mary Gordon," whose books were greatly admired in America.

"I have had the privilege of reviewing all your aunt's books," he told John, "and I had always promised myself the very great pleasure of making her personal acquaintance the first time I came to Europe."

He took great pains to propitiate John, who disliked him intuitively from the first moment, and ever afterward thought of him as the black and white fellow.

The news that Aunt Minnie was going to marry this Mr. Ferrar (he had Italian blood in him from not very far back, and the concluding vowel of his name had been amputated in the last generation), came rather as

the fulfillment of a dreaded possibility than as a surprise. The advantages from Aunt Minnie's point of view were, indeed, only too obvious when they were explained, although John had not fully realized them until she gave him all her confidence a fortnight after his first sight of the man she was going to marry so soon.

"It will be such a relief to have a name that I've some sort of right to," she began at the Sunday lunch to which, on this occasion, Mr. Ferrar had not been invited, although he was expected later; and from that she went on to tell him something of what she had suffered in the past twenty-five years.

John realized as a result of that confession how very little he had ever known of her, and more particularly of how far she had been a slave to her sense of duty. It was that which, after her great initial mistake, made when she was only nineteen, had kept her faithful to the worthless Albert Fortescue—until he had deceived her past all forgiveness. And adding to this all she had so carefully omitted, John found an explanation of her attitude to himself. She had done her best, all that she felt she ought to do; but she had never really cared deeply for him. Perhaps she was incapable of caring deeply for any one? And now that she was free, at forty-five, to cut herself off from all the associations that had irked her—in Boston only her husband would know the story of her past life—free to lead a literary circle as an admired author and the wife of a well-known editor; there no longer remained any urgent responsibilities to compel her to further acts of self-sacrifice.

"You can't understand, John," she said, "what a relief it will be to me to feel respectable again." And then, with a retrospective thought to a duty that still had some claim upon her, she continued: "And after all, why shouldn't you come and live in Boston, later on, when you've finished your articles? Stanley" (the black and white fellow's full name was Stanley P. Ferrar) "says that there are splendid openings for architects out there. You must talk it over with him when he comes."

But John did not wait to see Mr. Ferrar, that afternoon. The promise of an office in Boston under that patronage did not appeal to him. Moreover, he, too, had duties that he could not shirk, to Mr. Peterson and to Aunt Caroline.

He dwelt persistently on those admirable reasons when, later, he excused himself from any present consideration of the plan to settle in the United States. Aunt Minnie seemed disappointed and Mr. Ferrar thought him quixotic. To neither of them could John explain—and even in his own mind this essential was little more than an unexplored background—that he was no longer so eager as he had once been to be within reach of Aunt Minnie. She would soon forget her slight disappointment in the thought that she had done her duty by him, so far as had been possible.

Almost her last words to him were: "Remember, John, we shall always be glad to have you at any time."

He believed that she would always be glad to have him; would, indeed, prefer that he should live near her. But for him that was not enough.

And it was perfectly true that he would not now like to leave Aunt Caroline. He did all her accounts for her, and not only made out, but also signed the checks. She had missed him greatly when he had had to be away so long at Boulogne. Miss Penny was still being quite satisfactory, if inclined to be too fussy, but Miss Fortescue felt that she would never be quite at ease again if a stranger were managing her money affairs. "I shall be bound to worry, John," she said. "I don't believe I could help worrying, and as likely as not I should end by offending the poor little thing, though I'm sure she's perfectly honest. That other business seems to have shaken me."

She was, unfortunately, to be shaken still more seriously some ten months after Aunt Minnie had won a name and respectability for herself without neglecting her duty. John blamed himself for not having had the least suspicion of the calamity until it actually fell. This was but another example, he thought, of his old stupidity. He had no gift for drawing the obvious deductions from the material under his observation. How often in his experience had he realized too late that he might have foreseen what would happen if he had been more clever. He had never suspected anything unusual in the relations of his family in the old days at St. Edmund's Terrace; nor the fact of that horrible *liaison* at Cannes; nor the intentions of Miss Ellis; nor the true character of Aunt Minnie's feelings for himself. But after this he really must take Mr. Peterson's advice and distrust everybody until they had indisputably proved their sincerity and trustworthiness

The unsuspected criminal on this occasion was Mr. Pensfield, Miss Fortescue's man of business, who had managed Aunt Lizzie's affairs for some years before she died. John had seen him only twice, and had not liked him. He was a rather short, stout man, with a little beaky nose and an air of considerable self-importance. In dealing with John, he had been short-tempered and very impatient of John's complete ignorance of legal terms and methods. But John, if he had resented this treatment and disliked the man himself, had never for a moment entertained the suspicion that this pompous little lawyer might quietly disappear one day after having fraudulently transferred a large proportion of his clients' funds to his own uses.

He had shown himself to be an unusually shrewd defaulter, and doubtless much of his pomposity had been assumed as a disguise for his fundamental slyness. No one had been taken into his confidence. His office had been run with but two clerks who were not less astonished than Mr. Pensfield's clients by their chief's defalcation.

They believed that he had gone for a three weeks' tour in the south of France. He had done the same thing two years earlier, and if April were an unusual month for a lawyer's holiday, the irregularity was explained by the fact that he was under doctor's orders. He had given them no address except Poste Restante, Paris, having made no arrangements ahead as to where he would stay. On the surface, all his affairs had been left in perfect order, and he had been away for nearly five weeks before his clerks began to get uneasy. An-

other fortnight had passed before it was definitely realized that he had absconded, by which time he was safe from pursuit. It became evident then that he had been laying his plans for years.

John's immediate reaction was one of passionate resentment and a desire for revenge that he had not experienced in the case of Laura Ellis. For her, he had had contempt mingled with a touch of pity. He wanted to murder Pensfield.

Mr. Peterson, although decently sympathetic on Miss Fortescue's account, professed an admiration for the escaped criminal. "He's a rare, a very rare type, my boy," he explained to John. "Your ordinary defaulting lawyer begins by peculation, is tempted to plunge a bit deeper, and eventually gets caught; because at bottom he values his respectability too highly to want to make a bolt, however safely. He's a creature of habit, and he hangs on to the only life he knows how to live, until it's too late. Some, of course, speculate with their clients' money and ultimately become rich and successful. We don't hear of their crimes because they never come into the police-court. His sort is just the ordinary successful swindler that we all esteem so much. There are plenty of 'em about in most walks of life, and we speak of 'em in the press as our highly-respected fellow-citizens. Quite right. So they are.

"But your Pensfield is an exception. He didn't, as far as one can guess, care a curse for respectability of the churchwarden type. What he wanted was enough money to live on at his leisure; and he meant to get it quickly. He's the representative anarchist, my boy. I

didn't mean a fanatic, a half-demented bomb-thrower, but the fellow who makes his own laws and doesn't mind what society at large thinks of him. He's a burglar with brains, who knows a better game than breaking into houses with a crowbar."

"I'd like to break his head," John interpolated.

"Of course; of course!" Mr. Peterson exclaimed. "He doesn't belong to the herd, he's a solitary, a rogue, and we recognize him as our natural enemy. If he were caught and punished, he wouldn't find a soul to have pity on him; and if he's the man I take him for, he wouldn't care. Personally, you know, I'm not less afraid of a man like that than the rest of the world is; but, by gad, I admire him."

John, however, could never find in himself one grain of admiration for Mr. Pensfield; nor any sympathy with anarchism. He had been too much ashamed of his own single experiment in that direction, to explain the reason of his break with the Mallorys to Mr. Peterson —who, apparently, had never heard of it from the Mallorys themselves—although Mr. Peterson was the only person he knew who would probably admire him for what he had done.

But Mr. Peterson was such a queer mixture of a man. His actions never seemed to accord with his philosophy. What could be less anarchistic, for instance, than his insistence that henceforward John should receive a salary of three pounds a week, hinting moreover at the possibility of a partnership in a few years' time.

With that three pounds a week, John and Aunt Caro-

line would still be able to live, in somewhat altered circumstances, as there still remained to Miss Fortescue an income of two hundred pounds a year paid out of the business of Aunt Lizzie's brother; an investment that Mr. Pensfield had been either afraid or unable to touch.

The move to the three unfurnished rooms in a lodging-house that John found in Torrington Square was accomplished without great difficulty. Ellen had to go and Miss Penny. After this, Miss Fortescue would have to depend upon the landlady of the Bloomsbury house for her meals, and for any other service upon the general servant who had, also, to wait upon the tenants of the other floors.

But what she would have done without John, Aunt Caroline protested, she simply dared not think, and shared her thanks between him and the kind Providence that had guided his steps back to St. Edmund's Terrace, nearly three years earlier.

Among the various articles of furniture removed from St. Edmund's Terrace to Torrington Square, John included the tapestry; and it was here that he first began to work upon it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TAPESTRY—II

IN LATER years, the sole reason ever offered by John for undertaking that queer task of completing the tapestry was that he hated to see a thing left unfinished. The explanation appeared sufficient to any one who knew him well. He had application and a great pertinacity, he was of the type that succeeds in an ordered and peaceful society. But in this case it was not the practical, obvious John who was responsible. He had not begun the tapestry, and it was no more his affair to finish it than it was to carry out any other of the countless unfinished jobs the world of his experience so frequently presented to him. No, it was the other John who, half reluctantly, as though compelled by a force he did not wholly respect, set himself to the monotony of an hour and a half's work on the limning of Joshua nearly every evening—the John who showed veins of superstition, idealism, intuition; the John who whistled and was good at imitations, and who was developing so rapidly a feeling for design in architecture and a gift for expressing that feeling in his drawing. But among all those veins, one alone was responsible for his attempt to complete the tapestry, the vein of superstition. He did not know why he should undertake

that work, but he felt that he "had to do it"—a confession made only to himself.

His hour and a half's work was put in at night, after Aunt Caroline had been successfully read to sleep, and the little world of Torrington Square was at its quietest. At half past eleven the hansom cabs began to bring people back from the theater; five nights out of six, two or three drove into the square about that time. Then John would get up with a deep intake of breath that was hardly a sigh, go over to the window and, looking out, dream for a few minutes of his future or reflect on his past.

Compared with Soutar and Phillips, he had had, he felt, quite an adventurous and varied past. They had always lived the same life. Soutar had come to Peterson's office as a pupil when he was eighteen, and had stayed on as an assistant. He had been in Great James Street now for over twenty years, and was earning four pounds a week. Phillips, who was a year younger, had been there for nearly eighteen, and his hope of ever earning more than three pounds a week was exceedingly remote, as he had no talent for mechanical drawing. He had entered the profession of architecture by chance rather than choice; a friend of his mother having been, also, a friend of Peterson. He was not, however, jealous of John's rapid advance in position and salary.

He and Soutar both recognized John's ability. Soutar had already suggested that he and John should enter together for an open competition, and they were watching the architectural and building papers for

something that looked attractive, the first winter after John came to live in Torrington Square.

He was there altogether for five years, but he had not finished the tapestry when he left. There were so many interruptions. When he was working on a competition, either for Peterson, or privately, in collaboration with Soutar, all his spare time was taken up, and sometimes Joshua was entirely neglected for months at a time. Nevertheless, it was the tapestry that held the key to all his associations of that period, becoming for him in after-years a kind of chart on which he could read not only the story of his acts but also the thoughts and emotions connected with them. As he worked, he wove into the pattern the happenings of every day. There were necessarily many blanks in his record. The story of those five years was as if it were written in a diary irregularly kept. But after his work had been put by for a more or less prolonged interval, some part of the recollections belonging to the time when he had been too busy or too tired to spare even half an hour for his self-imposed task, was related to this queer register of his life.

A part of that intricate and difficult middle distance illustrating the conflict of the armies in the valley of Ascalon, was taken up again after a very strenuous time, during the greater part of which he had been staying at the office until late every evening to help in the completion of a set of immense drawings that Peterson was unwisely entering for a great infectious hospital competition in Southeast London. With that piece of the tapestry John associated a sense of worry and im-

patience. He had had to neglect Aunt Caroline, who was often awake when he came in, and then, however tired he might be, he always read to her until she was asleep. It was not the strain upon himself, however, that worried him so much as the sense of futility. Peterson had been ill-advised to enter for that competition, and John knew it.

They were not experts in hospital work in Great James Street, and were sure, despite the intensive study they made of the subject for some months, to make mistakes. Peterson had been tempted by the size of the job—the estimated cost was two hundred thousand pounds—and was a little carried away by the belief that he had conceived an ideal plan for the arrangement of the principal buildings, which were spread over a site of eighteen acres.

John put his brains, if not his heart, into the job, and when it was over and their failure announced, Peterson admitted that John had been right. "I can hardly expect you to know your own limitations at your age," he said; "but I'm beginning to fancy that you know mine better than I do myself."

"Oh! no, sir," John had replied, "not yours. But I think I do know my own, more or less."

Peterson had looked at him with a long thoughtful stare, before he had said: "Not you. You'll surprise yourself one day, my boy. Perhaps not as an architect, but as a man."

Quite a number of the opposing armies' heads, shoulders and weapons were associated with that comment of Peterson's. John, puzzling over it as he worked,

could imagine no way in which he might presently surprise himself.

Another recollection, right in the foreground this time, and woven appropriately enough about the ear of Joshua, concerned his visit with Phillips to a smoking concert given by the Architectural Association Lyric Club—one of John's rare relaxations.

He had enjoyed that evening. He and Phillips had sat down at a table next to two young French students of architecture, who, when he had spoken to them in their own language, had hailed him with delight, their own English being as yet very imperfect. Afterward the president of the club, in whose office the two young Frenchmen were working, had been introduced to John, and, apparently taking a fancy to him, had stayed at that table most of the evening, a chance that led to John's taking a part in the performance.

"Here, Fortescue, don't you do something?" the president had asked him, when one of the items of the program had fallen through; and John had modestly admitted to being a whistler. His turn had been a great success, and he had achieved a still greater, when, by way of encore, he had given them his dialogue between the Provençale peasant and the American tourist. Probably only the two young Frenchmen and the president had understood the Provençale side of the conversation, but every one had seemed to find it immensely amusing, and after that John had often been invited to perform for them. He had gone whenever he had felt that Aunt Caroline could spare him.

Such memories as these represented the high lights of

those five years, and they were very few. Aunt Caroline had another companion who came in at ten o'clock in the morning and stayed until six, but it was the nightly reading that chiefly tied John. It was due solely to Aunt Caroline's emphatic protests that he took any holiday at all in the course of those five years.

It was a kind of pleasantry on his part that associated the memory of those holidays with the foliage at the sides of the tapestry. He chose deliberately, on his return from the country, to work at the two gigantic trees that framed the sides of the picture, reaching up to the heavens and arching toward each other overhead, leaving, however, a fine open space in the center of the sky for the vision of God and the angelic host. It seemed to John some kind of prolongation of his country freedom to work on those trees for a month or two, and stitch in the memory of walking tours with no luggage but a knapsack; the days spent for the most part under the open sky, the nights at little country inns. Nevertheless he managed to visit quite a number of English cathedrals in the course of four such holidays —Salisbury and Exeter, the year he went to the West country; Norwich, Ely and Peterborough, the year he tried Norfolk and was driven by bad weather to take to the train and do a little extra sight-seeing; York and Durham, the year after; and on his last, and as he counted it, most successful tramp of this kind, Hereford, Gloucester, Wells and Glastonbury Abbey. He always had his sketch-book with him, and made admirable little "notes" of architectural detail wherever he went. As a draftsman he developed very rapidly. His

drawing was cleaner and more accurate than that of any one in the office, including Peterson himself.

It was a still more whimsical touch on John's part that led him, before the face of Joshua was quite finished, to set to work on his helmet—a kind of steel casque evolved by the ingenuity of the tapestry designer as being suitable for the occasion and the period. John's explanation, confided to Aunt Caroline, was that his interview with Peterson that day had "fairly put the cap on" his own career.

Peterson, on this occasion, firmly repudiated John's accusation of generosity when the definite offer of a partnership was made.

"My dear chap," he said; "I stand to gain every bit as much as you do. I've more work than I can comfortably look after, and now this Paris job is coming off, it is absolutely essential to have a partner who speaks French—technical, building-trade French."

"You might get a partner who would bring some capital into the business, though, sir," John suggested.

"I might or I might not," was the reply. "But, you see, my lad, first of all one doesn't want capital in this business; secondly, it's not everybody I could work with; thirdly, oh! and twenty-thirdly, if you like, I want you and no one else."

"But you might keep me on as manager or something at five or six pounds a week, you know, sir, without making me a partner," John remonstrated.

"And having you going off on your own at the first good opportunity?"

John grinned. "Unlikely, sir, in any case," he said;

"and anyhow it would be time enough to offer me a partnership when I showed the first signs of leaving you."

"I prefer it this way for my own sake," Peterson replied. "And I'm the last man in the world to be generous without a thoroughly good reason. You'll come in on a low proportion of the profits, four-fifths to me and one-fifth to you for the first five years. I've got a superstition about the number five. And quite enough, too, for a fellow of your age. It ought to be worth the best part of a thousand a year to you at once; and as you know, there's more big work ahead. In any case, we shall have to have another draftsman and another tracer as soon as we get to work on the Paris job. I suppose we can find room for 'em somewhere?"

"I've always felt you would succeed, John, dear," was Aunt Caroline's comment on this great news. "You're so steady. So very, very different from your poor father."

John had a momentary vision of a figure on the Nice promenade that seemed to bring with it a sense of the warm southern air. Some day, before long perhaps, he would go to Nice again and find out what had happened to his father. Had he become Isabelle's puppet, subdued, *apprivoisé* by her drastic methods, a respectable *petit* bourgeois with no control over his own money? John had a spasm of pity for him. John never learned to know men and women, and his intuitions only served him with those whom he loved.

His partnership had little effect upon his mode of life. Aunt Caroline had no wish to live anywhere but

in Torrington Square, to which she had now grown fully accustomed.

"You see, John," she explained; "it makes so little difference to me where I live so long as I know my way about and can have the little comforts I'm used to. And I don't think I should like the country after living in London all my life."

John agreed cheerfully, although that spring he was longing for free air and the smell of the earth.

At the office, almost the only change in his work and relations was that involved by the fact that he now worked in Peterson's private room. When he was alone with Soutar and Phillips they addressed him as they had always done; Soutar as "chappie," and Phillips as "old man." Soutar groused sometimes and made sarcastic comments on John's sudden rise to power, but there was no real jealousy in him, no ill-will. John had won Soutar's admiration by the way he had mastered his job.

The partnership agreement was completed in April, 1896, when John was still four months short of his twenty-seventh birthday; and he completed the head and casque of Joshua a few weeks later.

Aunt Caroline, who followed the progress of the work with her fingers, was quite excited.

"You're sure you have all the colors correct, John?" she asked.

"I may have altered them a trifle," he told her; "but the effect is all right."

He had been tempted now and again to alter the drawing also, but the touch of queer superstition in

him with regard to the tapestry, combined with his appreciation of the fact that, queer as the design might be, it was, as he put it, "all of a piece," all of it obviously the work of one hand, had influenced him to leave the essential pattern quite untouched.

"Dear, dear, you *are* getting on," Aunt Caroline repeated. "How much more is there to do, John?"

"Well, there are a few clouds to fill in and then I shall be up to God," he said.

"John!" Aunt Caroline rebuked him.

But it was to be many years before he got through those few clouds that still intervened between him and God, for something happened to him that drove the tapestry back under its linen wrapping, to stay untouched until once more he sought it out as a refuge in his solitude.

He had a perspective in the Academy that year and went with Peterson to the private view. After they had spent a critical half-hour or so in the architectural room, they made a tour of the Galleries. And it was there that some one, coming from behind him, laid a hand lightly on his arm and, looking up at him as he turned round, smiled and said with, as it seemed to him, the very same intonation that had greeted him nearly seven years earlier: "Hello, John!"

CHAPTER XV

VIVA

JOHN found Viva changed, and yet essentially the same after those six and a half years. Indeed, he went further back than that, and recognized the little girl of ten whom he had so greatly wished to please when he went to say good-by to the Mallorys before he left England. She was twenty-two now, and had grown since he had last seen her, although she was still some five or six inches shorter than himself.

She held out her hand to him before she greeted Mr. Peterson, and John noted the different quality of her smile as she turned to his companion. It was there that he first marked the change in her. When she spoke to Mr. Peterson she showed herself a woman of the world, mannered, perhaps a trifle insincere; in her salutation of himself she had had still the frankness of the schoolgirl.

"Mother and father are here," she said to John as soon as she had shaken hands with Mr. Peterson. "And I know they'd love to see you again. Shall we try to find them?"

John's eyebrows went up, and his mouth shaped itself into a whistle. "But, I say . . ." he remonstrated.

"Oh, that!" Viva replied with a laugh. "You've been forgiven for that years ago; after I explained, that's to say."

"Explained? What? How?" John asked, finding himself embarrassingly short of words.

She looked up at him with a smile that was half-penitent, half-mocking. "I was very frightened and very naughty that night after the great crime," she said; "and I simply dared not tell the truth; so I said it was you, only you, that had done it. There was a frightful row, of course, and I was packed off to a school near Paris. I fancy mother would have forgiven you for tuppence, even then, but father was terribly annoyed, naturally, poor dear, at having his *chef-d'œuvre* burned, and he played the stern parent. If he'd met you about that time, he would have put his hands behind his back, cocked his head in the air and looked very magnificent. What made it worse was that he thought you'd been making love to me, which would have been, of course, frightfully shocking. Whereas . . ." She paused and screwed her mouth into a delicious little button before she continued:

"It was nearly a year before I told Jane the whole truth, and then she first shook me till I cried and afterward made me tell everything all over again to father and mother. You were forgiven then, more or less; but father 'thought it best' that we shouldn't see you again. You see, although he was willing to admit that you might have taken the part of Adam, and not of the serpent, he probably thought you would have an eye upon Eve all the same."

"All this," Mr. Peterson put in, "is absolutely Greek to me. Never a word have I had of it all from John."

"Your own fault for not coming to see us all the time," Viva said gaily. "Father often talks about you. Now come along, both of you, and let's find him."

To find him was not difficult, but to approach him or Lady Mallory was quite another matter. Sir Vincent, as president of the Academy, was, with the aid of his wife, receiving the more distinguished visitors, and just at that moment they were the center of a dense crowd. But while Viva was impatiently trying to find an opening, the two tall men, John and Sir Vincent, caught sight of each other over the heads of the people, and the smile and the wave of the hand John received was to him sufficient satisfaction.

"Sir Vincent and I have nodded to each other," he whispered to Viva. "Never mind now. It's all right."

"Oh! well, yes, all right; we can see them later," she agreed. "Let's go where there's less crowd, and talk; shall we? I want to hear what you've been doing all these years."

Peterson with an amused smile turned away and left them to themselves.

"Let's go to the architectural room," John suggested. "There's no one there, and I'll show you my drawing. I'm an exhibitor, too."

"But how splendid!" Viva exclaimed. "And are you being successful?"

"Not bad," John admitted modestly. "I'm in partnership with Mr. Peterson now." Never had he been so proud of the fact as at that moment.

She gave him a quick appraising glance before she said: "You ought to have worn a frock-coat and a top-hat, of course, but those things suit you better, I suspect."

John looked down at his dark gray suit, which was quite new, and for which he had paid more than he had ever given for a suit before. "I don't own such a thing as a top-hat," he explained. "Never wanted one, you know. But I suppose now . . ."

Viva, herself, was a very model of the prevailing fashion in a picture hat, leg-of-mutton sleeves, bell-skirt, and a waist that certainly measured less than twenty inches round. For a moment the old, almost forgotten sense of his clumsiness returned to John.

"Oh! I don't know," she returned. "Mr. Peterson doesn't wear one either. But then he's some kind of socialist, isn't he?"

"Is he?" John said. "I didn't know he was."

"Are you?" she asked.

"No idea," he replied. "Never thought about it."

It was not until after she had critically examined and praised his "perspective" that they came to any talk of what the past seven years had done for them. John's story was soon told, and all that he said of his father was that he had married again and was living in Nice.

"I've been having a pretty dull time, generally, outside my work," he concluded; "now what about you and all your people?"

"Edward's married," she told him. "Quite a nice girl, and they've got a little daughter eight months old. He's on the Stock Exchange—Edward, I mean, of

course. And Helen is married, too, to a Frenchman, an artist. They live in Paris, and are quite important people. I go to stay with them fairly often. I adore Paris."

"And Jane?" John put in.

"Still living at home; and making up her mind to be an old maid. She might have married if she'd wanted to. Men like Jane, although she's not exactly pretty; but she's never seemed to care about any of her admirers much."

"And—and you?" John inquired with a touch of awkwardness. There was no sign of any husband or fiancé about, and so far as he could see through her long white gloves, she was wearing no ring on her left hand, but he had a sense of distinct uneasiness as he waited for her reply.

"Just the same as ever," she said with a little gesture that had an effect of displaying herself for his inspection.

"You're not engaged, yet, for instance?"

"Not at the moment," she told him.

"You mean?"

"Goodness, yes. Lots of times. But nothing really serious, so far. I'm beginning to wonder. I'm twenty-two already, you know, and I shall be on the shelf before I know where I am."

John turned his head away and stared down through the window by which they were standing, into the thronged courtyard of Burlington House. He hated to think of her having been engaged "lots of times." It seemed to be a kind of disloyalty, although there was no conceivable reason why she should be loyal to him.

But those other men must have kissed her, and the thought of it made him writhe.

Viva, suddenly grave, was looking down at the floor. "Haven't you ever been engaged?" she asked.

"Oh! Good lord, no," John replied roughly.

"But I suppose you've had—affairs?"

"Never, of any sort or kind."

"Frightful crowd here to-day," was all her answer to that. She had joined him in his regard of the splendid line of victorias, landaus and broughams, waiting in the square below; a vision of brilliant paint-work, magnificent horseflesh, gleaming silver-mounted harness and smart liveries, all proclaiming the boast of wealth and rank.

"Yes! And not my sort of crowd, either," John mumbled. A few weeks ago, the prospect of earning the best part of a thousand a year had seemed to him so wonderful. Here, he was almost a pauper.

"No?" she commented.

John's thought strayed to Soutar and Phillips. "I suspect," he said, "that I've been some kind of socialist all the time without knowing it." Those men who had been engaged to her were probably all rich, titled too, perhaps. He knew nothing of her world, now.

"Funny you should only find it out just now," she remarked demurely.

"I feel so out of it, here," he said. "I don't know the same kind of people that you do."

"Oh! we know all kinds," she assured him. "So does Helen. You should see some of the artists I've known in Paris."

A new horror opened before John's eyes. Had she ever been engaged to a French artist? The thought of her temporary engagement to almost any Englishman appeared quite bearable in comparison to that.

"Were you engaged to any of them?" he demanded bruskly.

"No." The sound of her laugh was reassuring. "The only Frenchman I was ever engaged to was a Monsieur Duhart, a diplomatist with a wonderful brown beard. I was just nineteen then, and he was dreadfully in earnest about it all, and wanted to come over at once and see father. I put him off that for a day or two, and then I came home myself and wrote to tell him that all was over between us. There was . . . rather . . . a fuss; I remember. There have been quite a lot of fusses over my broken engagements at various times."

"But why did you—break them?" he asked.

"Oh! I only got engaged for fun, you know," she said. "I never meant to marry any of 'em."

She had certainly changed, John reflected. This was not the Viva he knew, nor the Viva of the portrait they had destroyed. He felt that he would like to talk to Jane about her. Yet whenever he met her direct friendly eyes, it seemed that she had not altered in any way since he first saw her as a child.

"Couldn't have been much fun for *them,*" he remarked dryly.

She slightly shrugged her artificially enlarged shoulders. "There have been no suicides up to now," she replied.

"Je m'étonne de ça," John murmured.

She looked at him roguishly. "Why in French?" she asked.

"It comes easier to me in some ways," John said, reddening slightly. "What I mean is that there are things you can say in French that sound, I don't know, silly, affected in English."

"Compliments, for example?" she inquired.

John shook his head. "It wasn't," he asserted. "I can't pay compliments in any language. I'm not that sort."

She was quite grave again as she replied, "No, I can believe that. I'm glad, too."

She was, he supposed, encouraging him to make love to her; but she had been honest, had warned him precisely what to expect—a flirtation, even perhaps a temporary engagement, just "for fun." And he was not prepared for that. If she was ready to give him her friendship, he would be her very faithful friend. But if he made love to her it would be in the gravest earnest; if he fell in love with her it would be for always, and oh! desperately.

"I wonder if your father and mother are approachable, yet?" he said. "I feel horribly ashamed still, to meet them; but Sir Vincent certainly nodded as if he had forgiven me."

"Yes, let's go and find them," she agreed, accepting his change of tone so readily that he wondered if she were not, after all, glad to be rid of him. She must have found him a very dull companion after the brilliant society she was accustomed to. He had been, he felt, so stolid and serious.

The same feeling returned to him as he furtively watched her later talking vivaciously to various men whose dress and manners he could never hope to imitate. He made no attempt to disparage them, even in his thoughts. It was envy rather than jealousy that was racking him, just then; and the person criticized was himself. He was keenly regretting that he had not been born other than he was.

Lady Mallory, at least, had not changed. She greeted him now with the same effect of welcoming his return after an enforced absence, that he remembered in her recognition of him in Regent's Park when he came back from Nice.

In appearance, also, she had altered very little. Some women develop new aspects with age, an exaggeration of some feature that seems to change the type. Lady Mallory's face remained essentially the same; a shade less plump, less fresh, perhaps; but surely any one who had known her at twenty would instantly have recognized her again after an absence of more than thirty years. The latest version of her appeared in a composition of classical figures that was one of Sir Vincent's three exhibits in that year's Academy.

"And you'll come and see us in Queen's Gate, John? Next Sunday? Come a little late, half past five or so, when the people are beginning to clear out a little," was her parting invitation.

For a moment he was tempted to refuse on the grounds that he had no top-hat. "Thanks; I'd like to," he said.

He bowed to Viva as he passed her on his way out, and she waved her hand to him with a friendly smile. He could not complain of that. It was the acknowledgment of an intimate, far more flattering than a formal handshake. He felt as if he had been put in a class apart from the smartly-dressed young man to whom she had been talking.

Aunt Caroline was asleep by half past nine that night, and John had taken out the tapestry, uncovered it and set it in the light of the reading-lamp he always used to work by, before he realized that some virtue had gone out of him. The sight of that familiar undertaking suddenly filled him with a sense of tired distaste. It appeared to him so dull, so foolish, so absurdly meaningless; a ridiculous and empty task for such a man as himself.

Why, he wondered, had he wasted so much precious time on it when he might have been so much better occupied? If there was indeed, as Peterson sometimes said, a streak of the old maid in him, the sooner he got rid of it the better; and this infernal tapestry was not a man's work.

The yellow and white convolutions of the woolly cloud on which he had been engaged were nearly completed, but he had no desire to finish them. The empty needle was neatly and firmly thrust under the wool where he had left it the night before, and he found himself devoid of the least wish ever to use it again. But he would put it all away tidily; take off the two rollers and wind them up tight one against the other before he put them on again; then wrap them up closely in the

linen sheet to keep out the moths. Some day, perhaps, another hand would take up the work and finish it.

But when the tapestry was all rolled up again and carefully put away, he sighed as if he were leaving some safe, familiar home to go out upon an unknown adventure that would lead him he knew not whither; that might—even then he foresaw the possibility—end in utter disillusionment and despair: only, he knew it beyond any shadow of doubt, in this thing he had no choice. He was not choosing deliberately; he was compelled by something infinitely more powerful than his own will.

Indeed, in all his life, had he ever been confronted with two important alternatives and resolutely decided between them? He had determination. When he had taken up the obvious course of action, he had always persisted in it. But the important turning points of his career, the decision to leave his father, the search for employment in Nice, the return to England, the acceptance of Peterson's offer, even the burning of Viva's portrait, had been undertaken on the impulse of the moment, without any serious consideration of probable advantages or disadvantages. It had been Fate, not himself, that had willed the outcome; and he had offered no resistance.

And now, although he was aware that he was definitely at a parting of the ways, that it was in his power not to go to the Mallorys on the following Sunday, never ever to see them again, he had no sense of hesitation on the brink of a decision. His known past and his unknown future were, he believed, as inevitable as

the pattern of the tapestry he had just wrapped up and set aside. And as in that case, in the religion of his childhood, in all the incomprehensible weavings of destiny, they presented the figure of some intricate unreadable allegory that it passed the wit of mankind to understand.

CHAPTER XVI

JOHN SURPRISES HIMSELF

AUNT CAROLINE was glad to hear that John was in with the Mallorys again. She had never quite understood, she told him, why they had dropped him so suddenly in the old days, but she supposed that people who were so rich and fashionable as they were, and had so many friends and acquaintances, were apt to forget.

"It wasn't altogether that," John said. He had never told her the story of the picture, and although he felt in a sense released now—as if he had paid the full penalty, and from henceforward could look back upon his act as upon a foolish imprudence of his rash unthinking youth—he had no sort of desire to confess the story of his boyish impulse to Aunt Caroline. He felt that he could never make her understand why he had done it. Had he ever understood himself? Also, he preferred to forget all about it.

"Well, in any case, it will be nice for you to know them again," Miss Fortescue replied. She was becoming less and less curious about the affairs of every day. "And if they ask you to stay to supper on Sunday, you must be sure not to hurry back on my account."

"Oh! they won't ask me to stay to supper," John affirmed confidently.

Nevertheless they did ask him, and for once he neglected his duty and stayed at Queen's Gate till eleven o'clock.

The new house was still more magnificent than the old one, but it had precisely the same air of being taken from one of Sir Vincent's pictures. And the Mallorys still had "supper" on Sunday night. "People sometimes dropped in," Lady Mallory explained; although on this occasion the only other guests besides himself had probably, John thought, been invited to meet him; one of them being a silent young sculptor named Paget, with a very square head and abstracted sea-blue eyes; the other, a very smartly-dressed architect of about John's own age, with intensely black hair, and whose eyes and voluptuous mouth had a suggestion of the East. He was, John learned, an Armenian, and the son of a very rich father, his own profession having been adopted solely as an outlet for the art in him, which burned for some expression. His adopted name, his own being too difficult for general use, was Basil Cheney. He spoke English without a trace of accent, having been educated at Harrow, and from the first moment John disliked and distrusted him.

Over the supper table they all talked "shop." Cheney's devotion to art had hitherto been able to find expression only in the designing of city offices, but he was hoping to do a bank in the West End before long, which, if he could but have a free hand with the elevation would give him a chance to do himself justice.

"Now, what sort of feeling would you try to get into the façade of a bank, Fortescue?" he asked.

"Trustworthiness," John replied briefly, to the general amusement.

"So like our John," Lady Mallory murmured.

The Armenian waved that aside. "Oh! no, no," he said contemptuously. "Opulence, my dear sir, opulence is the one possible note to strike."

"Une amorce pour les badauds?" John suggested grimly.

"Pour tout le monde," Cheney replied. "We are living in an age when advertisement is beginning to be understood. One must be original. Striking. Besides which, your British trustworthiness gives no chance to the architect. We know what that means; a solid Georgian pediment. Now I want to do something rich and florid. Don't you agree with me, Sir Vincent?"

But Sir Vincent, who had made a free use of classical architecture in some of his pictures, was on John's side. "I think you'll find your directors in favor of the British style, Cheney," he said. "It is, after all, more suitable to the English temperament."

"But I refuse to pander to it," Cheney affirmed, and gave his reasons at length. Every one listened to him with attention. He was so fluent, so self-confident, and, as even John had to admit to himself, quite interesting. His point of view might be unacceptable, but it was original and well-stated.

"The chief difficulty you'll find," John commented quietly, when Cheney paused: "will be to get your principals to spend money on exploiting your architectural style. Carving, for example, costs a lot of money, and it isn't so effective over here as on the continent,

because the London smuts tone down all the high lights so quickly."

"Oh, lord, yes!" the young sculptor put in. "You're right there, Fortescue. I'd go back to Paris, only I don't know any one there who'd give me work."

"We might be able to give you a job there, later on," John said, turning to him; "if you aren't too expensive. We're going to do a big block of buildings in Paris next year, I suspect. It's hung up for the moment by the difficulty of clearing the site. There are still a couple of leaseholders to be got rid of. But I suspect we'll get to work by next spring."

"Thanks, awfully. I'd love to work on a job like that," Paget said.

John liked him, if only because he was such a contrast to Cheney—now, obviously burning to get back into the conversation—and Sir Vincent, either because he had had enough of the Armenian for the moment, or because he wanted to serve the interests of a protégé, immediately took up John's subject.

"You'll find Paget a good man," Sir Vincent said. "I've seen his work, and he ought to be encouraged. Will there be much sculpture on this building of yours, John?"

"Afraid not," John replied. "Two or three months' work at most."

"You were a sculptor yourself, once, weren't you?" Viva put in.

"Only a carver," John admitted modestly; "although my *chef-d'œvre* was a caryatid. Absolutely rotten, of course," he added, turning to Paget. "I was only a

youngster, and all the training I had was from an Italian in the building-yard."

"Where was that?" Cheney inquired.

"In Nice," John said.

"Oh! that explains your French," Cheney remarked, with a touch of patronage.

"I was at school there for over two years before I went into the building trade," John explained, and continued, urged by an impulse to brag of having learned his trade in a school very different from that of the rich Armenian, "I carried a hod to start with. I was just eighteen then. Had to work for my living, you know. I began on fifteen francs a week."

Cheney looked bored. He was not interested in poverty. But Paget responded eagerly. He and John could understand each other. They were not rivals.

But the instinctive rivalry between John and Cheney became more and more evident in the course of the evening. After Lady Mallory had asked John to whistle, Cheney sang, in a rich high baritone; and John's imitation of the quarrel between Madame Mathieu and the porter at Nice was followed by an exhibition of Cheney's really remarkable gift for sleight of hand.

"Dashed clever," Paget whispered to John; "but I shouldn't care to play cards with him." John agreed. There was something about the Armenian's dexterity, he thought, that suggested cheating, and he was surprised to find, later in the evening, when he had a brief opportunity to talk to Viva apart from the others, that she was not of his opinion.

"Oh! but he's so clever," she said in answer to his confidence that "he didn't like that fellow."

"In a tricky kind of way," John acknowledged grudgingly.

"Father says he's a really brilliant architect," Viva replied. "And he has got a wonderful voice. Don't be mean, John. Give him his due. It isn't like you to depreciate people."

It was not, and John took himself to task for having done it, as he walked home all the way from Queen's Gate to Torrington Square. (He still walked everywhere when he had time. He disliked omnibuses, which he said "got you there no quicker"; regarded the smoky underground with a great dislike, and had not acquired the habit of driving in hansoms.) He found an explanation of his unwillingness to give Cheney his due on this occasion, in the fact that the fellow was a "dago." He ought to have made allowances for that, John decided, and tried to crush out the uneasy sense that he was, in some obscure way, afraid of him. However, if they ever met again he would be more polite.

They were to meet again several times in the course of the next few weeks; but although there was no failure of outward politeness in their manner toward each other, that queer sense of rivalry, of which both had been conscious from the outset, increased rather than diminished. John, on his part, definitely refused to seek any explanation of it; preferring rather to reproach himself for harboring any feeling of jealousy for a man who, confound it all, was not even a European. He was rich, of course, cultured in a way, had

been educated at Harrow and Jesus; but then so had many Indians, niggers even. The Mallorys could never really come to regard him as an intimate friend. He was of a different race. Viva would flirt with any one, but it was not credible for one moment that she would favor that dago with one of her temporary engagements.

The idea was too absurd for words.

The relations between Viva and John, himself, had not changed since their meeting at Burlington House. They were friends, criticizing each other sometimes, occasionally quarreling, but there had never been a suggestion of any flirtation between them. Once only had there been any real hint of that, when, more than six years earlier, she had been ready to tempt him in order to gain her own ends. At the Academy, he had fancied for a moment that she was willing to encourage him, but her eyes had been calm; they had never worn for him that look of invitation he had seen in them when she was flirting with other men.

He had had to endure that on two or three occasions; had been compelled deliberately to turn his back on the quiet corner in which she was entertaining some handsome, well-dressed youngster, and take his part calmly in the general conversation without another glance in her direction. He had steeled himself to that, with the reflection that he must reconcile himself to the certainty that she would marry one day; and that all that concerned him was to be sure that she chose wisely. If, for example, she became engaged to Arthur Gordon, Lord Constable's second son, John meant to do all he

could to put a stop to it at once. Gordon was not a fit husband for such a girl as Viva.

It was more than two months after he had renewed his friendship with the Mallorys, and the London season had reached that point between the Sandown Park and Goodwood meetings, at which people begin to talk of where they will be found in August, when John received a note from Jane asking if he could meet her at a Grafton Street tea-room that afternoon. "I will be there at a quarter to four in any case," she wrote. "There will be no one there then; and it is always rather a quiet place." She gave him no hint of why she wanted to see him.

John was very busy at the office, but he never contemplated the possibility of not keeping that appointment. Jane would not have written to him if she had not had some good reason for wanting to see him. One could always trust Jane to be sensible. "I'll be back by five at latest," he told Peterson, as he went out.

"Not you," Peterson returned, "not if you're going to meet one of your dear Mallorys, that's to say."

John made no reply to that. To say that he was going to meet Jane in the tone of one who refutes an accusation would be to imply that there was but one Mallory who could make him break a business engagement. It was better to let Peterson imagine that he was in love with the whole family.

He found Jane quite alone in the down-stairs smoking-room she had indicated in her note. "So you were able to get away? That's very nice," was her greeting, and after that she began to talk to him of affairs in

general, as if her object in meeting him had had no particular significance.

They had finished tea, and half a dozen other people had come in, before John, beginning to feel impatient, said: "Now, tell me what you wanted to see me about, Jane. I'm sure you had some good reason. I must be back at the office by five o'clock; we're frightfully busy." Also, he wanted to show Peterson that he had been wrong in assuming that his partner regarded the Mallorys as more important than his own business.

Jane blushed. "It was," she began, stopped, and then continued: "I don't know how to put it, because really I've nothing to go on, except what I can guess. But, John, are you and Viva just nothing more than friends?"

"That's all," John affirmed with a quiet certainty. "We've never been anything else. Never should be."

"But you'd care tremendously if she made—a mistake?"

"What kind of mistake?" he asked.

"In—well, in her marriage."

"Is she thinking of getting married?" John said calmly. He was prepared for this; but hoped that it was not to be Arthur Gordon, because then he would have to interfere. Why didn't she marry some fellow like young Paget, the sculptor. He was a decent chap.

"Yes, she is," Jane said.

"Do you mean seriously, or is this only another of her engagements?" John inquired.

"I'm afraid she's serious," Jane replied.

"Afraid?"

"Yes. I shouldn't like her to marry him, nor even to be engaged to him."

"Is it Arthur Gordon?" John said. "Because if it is, she must be stopped."

"How?" Jane replied simply.

"Somehow," was all John found by way of explanation.

"Well, it isn't Arthur Gordon," Jane said. "I'd sooner it was."

"But . . ." John began, and then, "Do I know him?"

"Very well," Jane told him.

"I can't guess. Who is it?" he demanded bruskly.

"Mr. Cheney," Jane said.

John shook his head. "Oh! no; that's impossible," he asserted quietly. "Absolutely impossible. She'd never do that."

"You don't know Viva!" Jane's tone was slightly impatient, and as she spoke she began to draw on her gloves. "Not a bit," she added sharply, as if he had contradicted her. "There are heaps of things you don't know about her. And this is one of the most important; this reason why she might just be mad enough to marry Mr. Cheney."

John had a queer sense of hearing her voice as if it came from a distance, of seeing Jane herself extraordinarily clearly, but as a very remote, active little figure, struggling feverishly with her long gloves. His whole attention seemed to be centered on the crooked fingers of her plump little left hand—so little it was, that she could not strike a full chord on the octave—diligent,

angry, and so intensely engaged in its own occupation. He could think of nothing to say.

"Well, do you?" Jane continued. "You do so take things for granted, John. All sorts of things. I've wondered sometimes if you kept your eyes shut on purpose; it has seemed so impossible that you shouldn't see things right under your nose."

He nodded, acquiescently. "It's quite true, I don't," he agreed. "I've always been like that."

"But you mustn't be, not now," she protested, still with that same note of impatience in her voice. "Because you know it's all nonsense what you said about never being anything more than friends with Viva. You've been in love with her ever since I can remember."

It might be true. He did not feel that he wanted to contradict Jane's statement. But what could he do, except try with all his might *not* to be in love with Viva? If she were married to a decent chap like Paget, John thought, he could be reasonably content.

"But even if I have been," he argued; "I've got no control over her."

Jane had succeeded with her gloves at last, and now laid both her hands on John's arms. "You have! More than you think," she said. "And you mustn't let her marry Mr. Cheney, John."

"She wouldn't," he replied.

"She would! She would! She would!" Jane repeated. "He's probably at Queen's Gate, now. He was coming at five o'clock, and she's going to see him all alone. I didn't try to reason with her. It wouldn't

have been any good. She was in one of those moods when you can't do anything with her. So when she told me he was coming, I just said I'd get out of the way because I loathed the man. And she smiled and said, 'Dear old Jane. It's frightfully good of you. Thanks, awfully. That was last night; so now you know why I wrote to you."

"Yes, I see," John replied quietly. "We'll go down there now, together, shall we?"

He looked at his watch and saw that it was already nearly five o'clock. He had had some other appointment, he remembered, for that hour, but it would have to wait. At present he was aware only of a picture that he could see with a perfectly horrible distinctness, interposed between him and whatever object he looked at; between him and the waitress to whom he paid the bill; and then between him and the hansom he hailed in Bond Street. He was aware of it somewhat enlarged as he tried to listen to what Jane was saying in the cab, diminished as he stared with a cold anger at the blocks in the traffic that held them up at Hyde Park Corner and the top of Sloane Street. The general effect of it was always the same, although the detail varied; a sleek black head and a handsome semitic face continually approaching a head with golden-brown hair and golden-brown eyes. Sometimes the semitic face wore a detestable leer that made John feel suddenly short of breath; and sometimes he saw a look in the golden-brown eyes that he knew only too well, though he had never seen it when they looked at himself; a glance of challenge and invitation, mingled with the excitement

of one who knowingly, almost exultantly, dares a great risk. John's agony lay in the fear that the two faces might touch. When they approached each other too nearly, he shut his eyes and looked quickly in another direction, and then the slow action of the two figures began again, gradually drawing nearer together, threatening the ghastly crisis that he tried desperately to prohibit by the sheer power of his will.

The vision was still with him as he leaped up the stairs of the Queen's Gate house; but vanished instantly as he opened the drawing-room door and saw Cheney standing on the hearth-rug with a tea-cup in his hand, and Viva looking up at him with just such an air of amused interest as she might have given to John himself.

They both turned to him with an air of startled surprise as he flung open the door and stood breathless on the threshold.

"Hello! It's our friend, John Fortescue," Cheney remarked, raising his very expressive black eyebrows. "Might I ask if by any chance the house is on fire?"

John paid no attention to that. In the midst of his intense preoccupation with the thing he was about to do, he found himself noting that Cheney's eyebrows were precisely the shape of two black slugs. Odd, that he had not noticed so obvious a resemblance before. *Deux limaces noires; deux grosses limaces* . . . his mind was very busy trying to find a satisfactory account of them in French, while he firmly closed the door behind him —he had left Jane behind to pay the cab—and walked steadily across the room.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Cheney," he said; "but I want you to get out. I've something to say to Miss Mallory."

His entry had been so sudden, the tone of his voice was so solemn and impressive, that for a moment even Cheney was deceived into the belief that John was the bearer of some tragic news.

"I say. What's happened?" he asked; and Viva leaned eagerly forward to await the answer.

"Nothing, yet, I hope," John replied, still with the same immense seriousness.

Cheney's eyebrows jumped again, and his mouth curved down into a sneer. His quick wit had instantly divined the meaning of that reply, but he erred in believing that John's manner was deliberately assumed.

"May I suggest, Mr. Fortescue," he said with an air of exaggerated politeness, "that it is for you to 'get out' and not for me."

John's face did not change, he made no movement as if to threaten his opponent, he did not even clench his hands, but when in a quiet even voice he repeated a version of his original statement and said: "Get out, Cheney; I've something to tell Miss Mallory"—the Armenian went, hurriedly, almost furtively, without any further hint of protest. For he knew, partly by his Eastern instinct and partly by experience, when a man was really dangerous; and he knew now, far more clearly and certainly than John himself, that he was in danger of his life. The next time they met as rivals, Cheney was unable to escape so easily!

John followed him across the room, and finding the key of the door in the lock, turned it after him.

Viva's face had worn a half-frightened smile during that very brief parley between the two men, but as John came back to her on the sofa her expression was one of anger.

"What right had you to do that?" she demanded.

John sat down by her, leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, and took his head in his hands. "I don't know," he said. "But I'm glad he went. I suspect I should have killed him. He thought so, too. I'm awfully glad he went."

He had a sense of great relief, of hair's-breadth escape. Peterson had told him that one day he would surprise himself, and now he had done it. But surely Peterson could not have meant that he was the sort of man who might commit a murder? Was there, then, some other way in which he might presently surprise himself?

"It's perfectly insufferable," Viva said. "I refuse absolutely to allow you to interfere in any way with my affairs. I shall see Mr. Cheney again to-morrow, if only to apologize."

John shook his head without looking up. "You couldn't do that," he replied. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have wanted to, after the way he sneaked out of the room. I can't imagine your liking such a sneak as that. But, in any case, I shouldn't let you."

"You!" she snapped. "What business is it of yours?"

A queer illustration came into his mind. "Well, I've served nearly seven years' punishment, of a kind, for

what I did for you before," he said. "Like Jacob did for Rachel, you know? But I'm hanged if I'm going to suffer another seven years this time."

He looked up as he spoke and met the challenge of her angry eyes. She was looking at him inimically, as if she hated him; and yet that very fact gave him a confidence he had never felt before. He had a sudden sense of self-reliance and power, of a certainty that this time he was making no mistake.

"I've always loved you," he said, holding her eyes; "ever since I first saw you when you were almost a baby. I shall always love you; I can't help it. I've tried hard not to; but I'm not going to try any more. I'm going to marry you."

She made a feeble gesture with her hands, as if she would avert a threatened danger. "You've not. I won't," she replied, but her voice broke as she said it.

"You will," John said. "It's got to be."

And then, as if, having now proclaimed the incontestable decree of fate, he were free of all further responsibility, he leaned toward her, put his arm round her shoulders and drew her to him. "Oh! Viva," he murmured. "Viva, Viva."

It was the first time he had truly touched her, and the intoxication of the physical contact overcame him, he held her more and more tightly, bent his head and pressed his face against hers, kissed her passionately, her eyes, her cheeks, her lips, again and again, more and more madly and eagerly; as though he would make up in this first embrace for all his seven years' loss.

And she did not resist him. She lay acquiescent, ap-

parently complacent, in his arms; suffering his fierce caresses without complaint, her eyes tightly shut.

"Oh! Viva, my love, my love, won't you open your eyes and look at me?" he pleaded at last. "Say you'll marry me."

The glimmer of a smile dimpled at the corners of her mouth. "Oh! John!" she said, hid her face on his shoulder for a moment, then looked up at him quickly with that glance of challenge and invitation she had never before given him; freed herself with a quick thrust of her hands against his shoulders, and stood up.

"Now, let's talk sense," she said.

"Very well! How soon will you marry me?" was his answer.

Her eyes mocked him. "You don't really think . . ." she began.

"Oh! don't I?" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

"No, John, no; not again," she protested, but he would take no denial, although he had to chase her across the room like a schoolboy.

Indeed, that was what he felt himself to be. All the repressed youth in him was wonderfully released. He had with one blow crushed down all the barrier that had been interposed between him and Viva. He knew that always they had feared and loved each other.

Nevertheless, when he was alone that night his overflowing gladness was crossed by a sense of shame when he remembered how roughly he had treated her. But, in the future, he would make amends for that.

CHAPTER XVII

MARRIAGE

NO OBJECTION was raised by Viva's family to her engagement. Lady Mallory made no secret of her approval. She had borrowed John's own word, and told every one that she had known him all his life and that he was so "trustworthy"; getting on so splendidly, too, in his profession. His father, she added, was a musician, Albert Fortescue, one still heard that tremendously popular song of his, *The Flood Tide,* you know; but he had married again and was living in Nice; his mother had been a Frenchwoman. He would probably come over for the wedding.

John accepted that version of his parentage without comment. There was no misstatement in it, however far it fell short of the whole truth, except in the suggestion that Mr. Fortescue might come to London to see his son married. John did not think that that was at all likely. Nevertheless, he wrote to him, for the second time in his life, and this time not a hurried note, but a fairly long letter, giving some account of his present position and prospects. He received no answer; but he felt, like Aunt Minnie, that he had done his duty.

She was coming back to England to see him married; braving the Atlantic crossing that she so much dreaded,

solely for his sake. And this time, he believed that she was coming because she wanted to, and not because her sensitive conscience reproached her. They had kept up a decently regular correspondence, and she had often pressed him to join them in Boston, although he had never been tempted to accept that invitation. He gathered that her marriage had been a reasonably happy one, and it was certain that she greatly enjoyed her prestige in the literary society of America's most literary city. Her recent books—John always received a copy—had been more "cultured" than her earlier and more popular ones. Many of her reviewers now compared her with Mrs. Wharton.

The engagement made an immense social difference to John. He had, hitherto, been merely one of the Mallorys' numerous and varied acquaintances, but now that he was to become Sir Vincent's son-in-law, every one seemed to have discovered suddenly that they had always liked him. If it had not been the tail-end of the season, he would probably have been greatly embarrassed by invitations. As it was, he had to entreat his new expensive tailor to make more clothes for him in the shortest possible time, for he had not even a dress suit; and since Viva rather mischievously insisted that he must be married in a top-hat and frock coat, he decided to get them at once and become used to them. They were to be married at the end of September.

The first time that he put them on, he regarded himself in the wardrobe glass with a stare of grave criticism. This, he felt, was not a John he knew. There had been no such incongruity about the loose trousers

and workman's blouse he had worn in Nice, as he found in his present reflection. And just for a moment, he wondered vaguely if he were making a mistake—not in marrying Viva, that had been ordained from the beginning, an essential in the original design for the tapestry of his life—but in attempting to live up to the Mallory standard? He was, John decided, a very simple person. He liked plainness and honesty in everything, in his work and in his life. In architecture he intensely disliked meaningless decoration, and he disliked it no less on himself. This frock coat and top-hat were a disguise, a pretense. He looked like a company promoter.

Nevertheless he later accepted Viva's assurance that he looked "perfectly lovely" with nothing more than a grim smile.

"I suppose I shall get used to 'em," he said.

He felt even more like a fish out of water the first time he wore his dress clothes; aware once more of his own awkwardness, as if he had returned again to the "clumping age." But that feeling, also, soon passed with use; and Viva was always there to tell him what he ought to wear for every occasion, to reassure and to praise him when he was self-conscious.

The difference in Viva since her engagement was, Lady Mallory confided to John, quite wonderful. "I've always thought what a splendid thing it would be for her to marry you, John," she said; "though I was a little doubtful sometimes if it would be equally good for you. But now I don't think I need worry any more about that. Already she's settling down. She snubbed

Mr. Gordon horribly when he was here the other day. Of course, one would expect that she should under the circumstances, but I felt, you know, that she did it because she wanted to, not because she ought. It makes such a difference. The truth is that she has always been in love with you, and that was what made her so restless and so inconstant. I'm sure she'll settle down, now. I know she's impulsive, and has been too fond of pleasure and excitement; but there's a great deal of good in her."

That good side of Viva's character was in evidence when the question of where they were going to live came under discussion. Viva was all for Chelsea. It was, she thought, just the proper setting for an architect, and she had an eye on one of the smaller houses in Cheyne Walk.

John shuddered at the rent, but it was not any financial consideration that settled the question, nor his own preference for a "snug little place" he had discovered in St. John's Wood not far from his old home in St. Edmund's Terrace. He would have given way without making a favor of his sacrifice—it seemed to him that he fell deeper and deeper in love with Viva every time he saw her—had not Aunt Caroline unexpectedly influenced their decision.

She was to live with them after their marriage. That was taken for granted. And it was Viva who referred the matter to her; giving her an account of the two houses she and John had, so far, visited.

Miss Fortescue listened with quiet attention to the description of the Cheyne Walk house, that was given

the place of honor, and said that she thought it "sounded very nice." But when the snug little place in Acacia Road, "not the Finchley Road end," was mentioned afterward as a just possible alternative, her face brightened and her interest became almost vivacious.

"You see, my dear," she explained, "it would be like home to me. I've lived in the neighborhood all my life almost. And I know Acacia Road so well and all the other roads roundabout. When I go out now, I always fancy myself as being in St. John's Wood again, but it isn't quite the same. It *sounds* different, you know, and smells different, and that reminds me that what I'm picturing to myself, isn't real, only my fancy. But, of course, you mustn't be guided by me in any way. I'm sure I can't be glad enough to know that you'll have me at all, though what I should do without John, now, I can't imagine. But I'm sure Chelsea is very nice, though I don't remember to have ever been there, and I've been told that in the hot weather, you get a cool air off the river."

"Well, we haven't decided anything yet," was all that Viva said at the moment; but that same evening, when she was alone with John, she announced very seriously that they were going to live in Acacia Road.

John shook his head. "We'll be able to manage the Chelsea house all right," he said.

"Yes, I think we should," she replied. "It isn't that."

"What is it, then?" he asked.

He was smiling, but Viva's face was very serious as she said, "I want to be good. I—I feel good, now, dear. Since we've been engaged. As if being good was all

that really mattered. And I should like, frightfully, now, to please you and poor Aunt Caroline. It would make me feel happy inside and all over, to tell Aunt Caroline that we are going to take her to Acacia Road. You needn't tell her why. Just say we can't afford the other place."

This was not another version, John decided, of Aunt Minnie's devotion to duty. There was no taint of reason in Viva's sudden passion for goodness; it was spontaneous, mystical, springing from the deepest inspiration of her being. She was not being generous in order to appease her conscience—she had told him once that she did not believe she had one—but because, as she had suggested, she felt like it.

"I shan't say anything of the sort," he said. "I shall tell her what an angel you are."

"Oh! I should like to be an angel, darling," she returned, with a hint of rapture. "You'll help me, won't you? I'm not, you know, not yet. But I want to be, frightfully."

There was no mock-modesty about Viva's aspiration toward sanctity. She had no desire to apologize for or belittle it. And John accepted this side of her with the same adoration that every attitude of hers had evoked since that magical moment when he had stretched forth his hand and worked the great miracle in a sudden access of self-confidence and certainty. It was queer to think that he might never have done it, if it hadn't been for Cheney. John owed him a deep debt of gratitude for that, which would almost certainly never be paid. They had not met each other again since that

afternoon. Cheney had called once at Queen's Gate, and Viva had refused to see him.

But if John was able to accept this new devotion of Viva's without suspicion—ascribing her new ambition to the natural beauty of her character, and seeing now in that old tale of flirtations and broken engagements nothing but a mistaken attempt to express a temperament, excitable and eager, no doubt, but fundamentally inclined toward virtue—her sister, Jane, was a trifle uneasy about it; uneasy enough to seek an opportunity of being alone with John in order to give him a shy word of advice.

"You know, it may last," she said, having tactfully led up to the subject of Viva's new "goodness." "I hope it will. You can never be quite sure with her, and when she has had fits of this sort before they've been different; more as if she were sorry and *trying* to be better. This time she's really happy about it."

"It's the real Viva coming out," John affirmed with a hint of the same rapture that Viva herself had displayed.

"It may be," Jane agreed, looking at him with a hint of uneasiness, "only, John, you mustn't be too sure of it."

"But I am sure," he said.

Jane looked distressed. "Yes, I know," she replied; "and that's splendid in one way. But you mustn't let her feel that you're *too* sure; you mustn't take it too much for granted. I mean, when you're with her. She'll expect you, you see, to admire her for it. She likes to be praised. It's so difficult to explain. But

what I am trying to say is, that though this goodness of hers is natural to her, so were her flirtations, too. Something to live for; if you know what I mean? Well, what it comes to is, that you must make it worth her while or—or she may get a reaction. Not now, perhaps, not before you're married—she's truly in love with you, John—but later on. And it will be then that you mustn't take her too much for granted."

"I don't think I could ever do that," John said with a great seriousness. "I can't believe that it's possible."

"Perhaps not," Jane agreed. "Not Viva herself. I can believe that—but her goodness you might. And if you do she'll very likely do something just to show you that you mustn't. And then anything might happen. She's very passionate, and her temper or her temperament, or whatever it is, might run away with her."

"Yes. I understand," John said solemnly.

Jane was generally right about these things, and on this occasion he found her more than usually convincing. Hers was, as it were, another reading of Viva. The essential traits of her character were those he knew for himself; but rather differently displayed; regarded with a less prejudiced mind; exposed more humanly and without that touch of adoration which made praise superfluous. One may worship God for His goodness, but one does not congratulate Him on it. With Viva, it seemed that encouragement of that kind might be necessary. John was willing to admit the possibility.

And Jane had touched a critical aspect of his relations with Viva, in saying that she was very passionate. There had been moments in the course of the last few

weeks of his engagement when he had been a little scared of Viva—and of himself. That look of invitation she had first almost reluctantly given him after he had kissed her, had been repeated since then, and grown bolder. He scarcely knew what had saved them on one or two occasions. He had not kept his first resolution to treat her with greater respect in the future when they were alone together. Not always. She had so obviously not wanted to be treated distantly, as if she were there only to be worshiped. And now he was no longer ashamed afterward, although there was still an element of deep respect in his love for her. Probably it was that which had saved them. He believed that she respected him, too. She had sometimes teased him desperately about his "trustworthiness," as if she would goad him to the point of disavowing and disproving it; but when she was in her more serious moods she told him that she loved him for his strength and his steadiness. "I feel so safe with you," she had said. He was determined that she should always be safe with him.

The only person who did not endorse that general opinion of John's trustworthiness was Peterson, who had promised to be "best man" at the wedding, on condition that he did not have to wear a frock coat and top-hat. He might have given way even in that if John had insisted, but John merely apologized for his own clothes and made no attempt to convert his partner. "Don't suppose I shall wear 'em again after we're married," he said.

"For a man who is reasonably sane in many ways,"

Peterson replied, "you're quite astonishingly short-sighted."

John knitted his forehead and tried to puzzle the thing out for himself. "I don't see why," he admitted, after a few minutes' silence, during which he had proceeded methodically with the setting out of the detail he was drawing.

"When you marry a Mallory you must do as the Mallorys do," Peterson said. "Your future father-in-law will almost certainly be made a baron in the course of the Diamond Jubilee next year, and Mrs. John Fortescue will expect her husband to live up to it as far as his means will allow."

"I'm not so sure about that," John interpolated. "You don't know her. She's . . ."

"I know *you,*" Peterson interrupted him; "and though you might be content on your own account to be the artistic son-in-law who wears a wide-awake and tweeds to call on his grand relations in Queen's Gate, you'll not be content to put your wife in a socially inferior class. She may be all you think her, but unless she begs you on her knees—which she won't—not to wear the kind of dress her class will expect, you'll always do it to please her, without being asked."

"Perhaps you're right," John agreed.

"Of course I am," Peterson said. "What people never see in you, and what you persistently, in face of all the evidence, refuse to realize in yourself, is that streak of recklessness. Every now and again you do things utterly regardless of the consequences. This marriage of yours is the latest instance. I suppose you're not going

to tell me that you weighed all the possibilities before you proposed to Viva Mallory. Did you ever, by the way, propose at all; or just suddenly tell her she'd got to marry you whether she liked it or not?"

"It was rather like that," John admitted.

"I thought so," Peterson returned. "The fact is, my boy, that you're not to be trusted. Remember that affair of the picture!"

Peterson had heard that story, now. Sir Vincent had told him. It had ceased to be a tender spot, and had become a joke since John's engagement to Viva. The inference to be gathered from Sir Vincent's rendering was that Viva had been very self-willed and naughty, and that John, silently but very heroically in love with her, had dared every kind of horrible consequence in order to please her.

John, himself, had been obscurely aware of some essential that was not taken into account by this version of the episode; and he had the same feeling now with regard to the statement that he was not to be trusted. But he countered neither misrepresentation because he had no more convincing account to offer in its place. It would sound absurd to say that there were moments when he seemed to stand on the hill looking down upon the valley of Ascalon, inspired with the power to work miracles; moments when he was freed from all the compulsions of the world, acting alone without thought of any consideration other than the need to enforce his will.

After all, Peterson was right in effect, if his premises were faulty. John had to acknowledge that when these

moments came he was not to be trusted. Suppose, for instance, that Basil Cheney had refused to go when he was told? But no! That was not possible! These flashes of inspiration, when he saw but one way before him and took it without hesitation, were sent to him by the Guardians of his Fate. He could trust them never to mislead him. At any supreme crisis they would give him the power to work the miracle that would put him in the right way, the only road for happiness and success. Never yet had he had to regret one of his surprising decisions. Even the destruction of Viva's portrait had turned out well in the end. If it had not been for that, he might have drifted into some sort of hopeless love-affair with Viva before he was in a position to marry her; and she and her family would have tired of him. It had been better that he should have been cut off from them all during those years; better in every way.

And the "Guardians of his Fate," as John had called them, did not call upon him to make any further critical decisions either before or during the celebration of his marriage at St. Margaret's, Westminster. His "I will," however earnest and determined, was but the natural sequence of the events that had preceded it, not in itself a miracle if it were the consequence of miracles.

Aunt Minnie, perceptibly older with a fine network of little lines coming about her eyes, shed a few tears of happiness over his success. She asked for no credit in the performance, she was just unfeignedly proud of him; seemed, indeed, now that he was no longer in any need of her, to be giving him that love he had once so

urgently craved. The duty she had set herself on this occasion was the care of Aunt Caroline, whom she had undertaken not only to look after on the day of the wedding, but also to install in the snug little place in Acacia Road, where she was to await the return of John and Viva from Paris.

They were going first to a quiet spot in Brittany for a fortnight, and then on to Paris for another week. John had one or two business appointments there in connection with the big job on which he hoped to employ young Paget. It was still being delayed, chiefly, John contended, by the dilatory methods of the French interests concerned; but in October he meant to have the affair definitely settled. Peterson had promised that if he could bring off that job his share in the partnership should be raised from one-fifth to two-sevenths. And John, returning with his wife to London in the third week of October, was able to announce that he had earned his rise.

Everything was going well with him.

At Acacia Road, the tapestry, tightly rolled and done up in paper to keep out the moths, the frame taken to pieces and tied together with cord, was lodged on a dusty shelf in an attic box-room in company with the cistern. Aunt Minnie had had it put there. John, himself, had forgotten all about it.

CHAPTER XVIII

OLD FORTESCUE

AUNT CAROLINE quietly faded out of existence in her sleep rather more than two years after John's marriage. She had grown very feeble in the last few months, and had more than once shaken her head and said wistfully that she did not believe she would see another New Year. She missed it by a few hours only, for she probably died about daybreak on New Year's Eve—a day that was to have been one of celebration for the Fortescues, since it was the first birthday of their eldest son, christened Vincent after his grandfather.

Aunt Caroline's death was the deciding factor that influenced John and Viva to give up the house in Acacia Road the following March and take one in Kensington Gate. All that Miss Fortescue had had to leave she had left to John, but the issue was decided less by the extra two hundred pounds a year that had come to him than by the fact that they were now free to live wherever they pleased. John and Viva had been agreed that it would be impossible to leave St. John's Wood while Aunt Caroline was alive.

Viva was delighted with her new house, and spent much time and thought in the choosing of her new fur-

niture. She was influenced to a certain extent by the advice of her father and mother, but John gave her a free hand.

"It's your house, darling," he said; "and I want you to have it just as you like it."

"But I could never be happy in it if you didn't like it, too," she remonstrated.

"And do you think it conceivably possible," John asked, "that I shouldn't like anything you'd given your heart and mind to?"

There was but one answer to that, and she gave it in full measure.

Yet there were moments when she was stirred by an uneasy feeling that John was being too kind to her. While they were living in Acacia Road she had always had Aunt Caroline to sacrifice herself for. Aunt Caroline had been a cross that she had borne willingly, a constant and delightful exercise in the "goodness" to which she had vowed herself, and the practise of which she had found so rewardingly agreeable. After she went to Kensington Gate, she found it so terrifyingly easy to be good—until she realized, when her son Vincent was a year and seven months old, that he was presently to have a little companion, whether brother or sister.

And it must be confessed that for a few weeks after that discovery, Viva was inclined to be intermittently peevish. She had been getting a little out of practise with her self-sacrifice since no call had been made upon her, and apparently did not recognize this as an occasion to renew her vows.

"It's such a nuisance just now, dear," she complained to John. "I shall be out of it practically the whole winter, and I was planning no end of things. I suppose there's absolutely nothing to be done?"

She looked at him hopefully, and for a moment John was puzzled.

"You don't mean . . .?" he asked.

"Lots of women do," Viva said.

"Oh, no!" John was quite definite now that he understood what she was hinting. He was willing to give her anything in his power, to deny himself any pleasure, if it would add to her comfort; but this was a matter of principle. Whence that principle was derived he did not know; he was sure only that in this thing there was but one possible answer to her suggestion.

"It is such a ghastly business," Viva complained. "I —I hate myself when I'm like that."

"My poor darling!" John took her in his arms, and then drew her down upon his knee. "This shall be the last time," he assured her. "But that other idea is absolutely out of the question. It's a kind of murder. Think of Bobby!" (The little Vincent was destined to be known as Bobby all his life.) "Think if we had not let him live."

But it was not John's arguments nor his appeals to her imagination that convinced Viva. She had understood from that first definite "Oh, no!" of his, the impossibility of altering his decision in this case. She had seen this strong inflexible side of him on one or two earlier occasions, and knew that when he had definitely made up his mind there was no reasoning with

him. It was useless then to tell him that he was being unreasonable. All his answer was gently to admit the possibility, and say that he could not explain why but that he "felt like that about it."

She had given up all hope of influencing him when she said pettishly: "Of course, it's sure to be a girl, and I detest little girls."

"We'll call her Jane," John replied.

But after that Viva renewed her vows, and recovering the spirit of her first resolution, became once more the pattern of goodness. John, who had never forgotten Jane's advice, gave her all the praise that was her due. He had become more accomplished in the expression of praise since his marriage, but during the months that preceded the birth of his second child his admiration and his statement of it were entirely spontaneous. Not only was Viva accepting her destiny with beautiful complacence, but she was also doing quite a lot of useful, stay-at-home war-work—making things for the troops in South Africa. Perhaps John rather overdid it. Even Lady Mallory grew a little tired of hearing how "wonderful" her youngest daughter was being.

Helen Commingue, who was much in London that winter—the English were something out of favor in Paris just then—was very much inclined to be impatient of her sister's virtue; and even accused her of having lost all her old spirit.

"Do you think so? But isn't it perhaps just as well?" was all Viva's humble reply, though she might so easily have retorted that Madame Commingue's failure in that respect was surely greater than her own.

Helen's marriage was not being a success, and surely it was a confession of weakness to shrug her shoulders and say that if you married a Frenchman you must expect that sort of thing.

But Jane, at least, gave Viva her due, if her method differed in important particulars from that of John. It was in the course of these months, before her namesake and godchild was born, that John first acquired the habit of saying, "I don't know what we should do without Jane." He usually said it in her presence, and it was accepted in those days as a kind of pleasantry.

Helen said that Jane had already become a regular old maid.

The little Jane—a grave determined child, supposed to be like her father—was more than two years old when a new and more searching test of Viva's quality was suddenly presented. In the interval she had shown a tendency to relapse. She was such a success. Everything was going well with her. She had a devoted husband, who was rapidly becoming famous in his profession. (The firm of Peterson & Fortescue was doing big work in both London and Paris, and John was saving money.) She had two lovely healthy children, to whom she was genuinely, if a trifle intermittently, devoted; a charming house in Kensington Gate; a select and interesting circle of friends and acquaintances; and, as a consequence, she was continually tempted to shine by virtue of her natural brilliance in so effective a setting, rather than as an example of the homely quality of mere goodness. John, not less than the children, was

sometimes neglected in the course of that London season of 1902.

He was in Paris, on the firm's affairs, in the middle of July, looking forward to a month's quiet holiday in Brittany, with Viva and the two children all to himself, when he stumbled on a relic of that past of his which seemed so infinitely remote from his present life.

He had dined with a recent French acquaintance in the Avenue d'Orléans, and was returning on foot to his hotel on the other side of the Seine. It was a sultry evening, with a threat of thunder in the air, and on his way back he entered the Luxembourg Gardens to find a touch of freshness and relief after the dry heat of the paved streets. Many other people had come to that oasis of southern Paris, no doubt with the same object, but John was not observing them with any interest. His thoughts were on the coast of Brittany and the company of Viva, Bobby and Jane, when his ear was caught by the sound of some one singing semi-intoxicatedly, yet with some underlying effect of jauntiness, an air that instantly banished the fresh winds of the English Channel from John's mind, and set him back on the shores of the Mediterranean.

He stopped short in his walk and looked about him. Who, he wondered, in that place could possibly be humming the refrain of that faded but once popular English song, *The Flood Tide,* full for John of associations that plunged him headlong into the past through a swift recoil of dissolving visions, so that in a giddy recession he lived again, in one brief instant of vivid

consciousness, scenes that took him back to his life as a young man, as a boy, as a small child; and even, as it seemed, beyond that, to some first early stir of infant awareness connected with that haunting, foolish melody. It may be that he had first heard it in his cradle. It must have been about that time that the one great inspiration of his life had come to Albert Fortescue.

John would not have recognized his father had he not been singing his own composition. He was sitting on the end of a seat, his head flung against the back of it, apparently staring up into the sky. Now and again he slipped a little forward, and scrambled paralytically with his feet to prevent himself from sliding to the ground. His singing was not continuous, but came in irregular spasms, the words of the song sometimes in the original English, at others in a French edition that substituted "*Marée haute, marée haute*" for the refrain "Coming home, coming home." His nearest neighbor, a comfortable bourgeois, had edged away from him leaving as much space as possible between them, and regarded him at brief intervals with a stare of the deepest suspicion and distaste. And even apart from his intoxication he was indeed a figure of disgust; his gray beard matted and foul, his clothes a mere collection of barely adequate rags, his toes protruding from his horrible boots.

He started convulsively when John laid a firm hand on his shoulder, and began abjectly to address, in rapid French, what he evidently presumed from force of habit to be the usual gendarme. Many of his words and phrases were couched in an argot with which John

was unfamiliar, but the sense of it was clear enough; he would be good, he would come without any fuss; and to prove it he staggered to his feet, reeling in the act, so that he would have fallen on his face had not John caught him.

It was hopeless to question him for the moment, and John, with a firm grasp of his arm high up near the shoulder, steered him as well as he could out of the crowded gardens in the direction of Saint Sulpice. Not until he had him in a quiet street, and propping him against the wall could hold him there by a firm grasp under the arm-pits, did John attempt to make himself known.

Even then he found the task exceedingly difficult. His father was obviously unable to keep his attention fixed on the matter of John's communication; or to remember its nature for ten seconds after having apparently grasped it. "Ah! yes, John; you're my son, John," he would repeat obediently in English, and the next moment lapse into French, and insist that he would be good and not make a fuss. A question as to where he lived produced a rambling and evasive statement that contained no useful information, but at last, John having been inspired to demand authoritatively, *"Votre adresse!"* in the manner of a police-agent, he received a prompt and intelligible reply.

Reference to three small boys and a still smaller girl who were looking on in the hope of interesting developments, produced an instant response. It appeared that they were well acquainted not only with "Mère Victorine," whose name had been involved in the direction,

but also with Mr. Fortescue himself; and were quite willing to act as guides. Mr. Fortescue was in his own neighborhood. John had but to support him for another hundred yards or so before they entered the narrow, disreputable-looking street in which Mère Victorine lived.

She was sitting in her doorway when the procession arrived, and her quick French intelligence was instantly equal to the occasion. Whatever John's interest might be in the "*sale* Albert" whom she occasionally befriended, there was without any question money to be made out of it. She got to her feet as quickly as her size would allow, and broke into vivid protestations of sympathy. She made it plain that in all Paris none was more worthy of pity for his undeserved misfortunes than the "*pauvre* Albert."

John scarcely heard her. He was thinking of the future; of what must presently be done with this obscene wreck of a man who was his father; of how it might affect not so much his own life as that of Viva. For the moment there was nothing to do but to leave him to the care of Mère Victorine in the hope that next day some appeal might be possible to his intelligence.

"I will come back to-morrow," John said, breaking in on Mère Victorine's eulogies. "You have some room where he can sleep? Good. Meanwhile there is but one thing you can do for me. Prevent him absolutely from drinking until my return."

He had his hand in his trousers pocket meditating the amount of the bribe, but decided to give none just then. If Mère Victorine were drunk herself, she would

be less likely to obey his one important order. "I will come back early to-morrow morning," he repeated. "And I expect to find him not drunk."

Mr. Fortescue, crumpled into the chair recently vacated by Mère Victorine, was already sound asleep.

John found his father more or less in possession of his faculties the next day, but suffering agonies of thirst. Mère Victorine had inferred that her best hope of reward lay in following the instructions John had given, and she had locked the *sale* Albert into his room, and disregarded all his entreaties. John had to provide a bottle of white wine before his father could give any account of himself.

The essentials of his story were few when robbed of the propitiatory details with which he sought to clothe it. He had rebelled against the slavery of his life with Isabelle some ten years earlier, but had not had the courage openly to assert himself. He had run away with all the money he could lay his hands upon—his *own* money, as he wearily reiterated; it was Isabelle who was the thief—and had come to Paris, where, after a not very protracted struggle to earn his livelihood, he had sunk to begging in the gutter. More than half of the past five years he had spent in prison.

John listened with a set face, now and again softly whistling under his breath. All the story was told in French—Albert Fortescue had scarcely spoken his native language for thirteen years—and his facts were few, his excuses many. His chief object seemed to be the attempt to save for himself some poor rag of reputation; although his one valid defense seemed to lie in

the *"Qu'aurais-je pu faire?"* that he repeated with such tedious insistence.

"Might have come over to London and tried to find me," John suggested at last, and thereby reached the one spark of decency that still remained in the all but total wreck of his father's honor.

"I was ashamed," the old man replied simply.

John believed that, and for the first time some faint memory of affection stirred in him. Pity, sympathy, he had been willing to give freely from that first sight of his father in the Luxembourg Gardens; but this simple admission of shame moved something deeper. His mind went back to the early days of St. Edmund's Terrace.

Surely there must have been lovable qualities in the man once, or Aunt Minnie would never have stayed with him all those years? It could not have been her sense of duty only that kept her at the beginning.

"Well, we'll get you out of this, now, at any rate," John said in English; and old Fortescue began to weep rheumy tears that he allowed to trickle out of the corners of his eyes and fall on the pillow.

"J'ai tellement souffert"; he murmured, and then, after a brief interval, manifested his first sign of interest in what his son had been doing in the course of all those years.

Even when he had been told the important facts, however, he evidently found a great difficulty in realizing them. He asked the same questions more than once, as if he had either not comprehended or had forgotten the replies he had received. And through it all, an un-

dercurrent of John's mind was perpetually preoccupied with plans as to how he was to get his father shaved, cleaned and respectably dressed.

So far as he could see the cleaning process could only be achieved by degrees. His father must somehow be induced to take the first steps toward that end; and then, when decent clothes had been bought for him, he might be taken to some hotel in which the more drastic stages of the operation could be conducted in the bathroom.

"Yes, yes, as I told you, I am married and have two children," John said bruskly, replying for the third time to the same wandering question. "Now listen"; and he gave his instructions peremptorily.

The old man responded to that tone, promising to do as he was told, with a touch of abject eagerness. It was evident that in the course of the past fifteen years he had acquired a habit of docility. Nevertheless, despite the assistance of Mère Victorine, from whom hot water had been demanded, the cleaning process had not been carried to a stage that met with John's wholehearted approval when he returned half an hour later with his father's new wardrobe. In that time he had also cabled to Viva, asking her to join him in Paris.

Old Fortescue was, outwardly at least, presentable when she arrived two days later, but John did not allow her to see him until she was fully prepared. He was not quite sure how she would respond to this new test. Indeed, for a few minutes after he had broken the news to her, her decision undoubtedly hung in the balance.

"But what do you propose to do with him?" she asked.

"In the future? I don't know yet," John replied. "I want to talk that over with you. For the moment, I thought we might find some quiet place for him near Ploumanach; and join him there on our holiday next month."

"You know Edward and his wife are going to be with us for a fortnight?" Viva put in.

John nodded. "They'll have to be told, of course," he said.

"But is he . . . does he . . . What about the children for instance?"

John frowned. "They'll hardly see him," he replied. "The truth is, you know, that he's a bit queer in his head, at present."

"Oh, lord!" Viva ejaculated, and sat down suddenly with an effect of desperation.

"He has had a frightfully bad time," John explained, looking out of the window. He could not forget that piteous confession of his father's, that *"J'ai tellement souffert"* which had been given with the whine of the professional beggar, but had had all the effect of a simple statement of the truth. Though all the fault might have been his own, it was certain that he had greatly suffered.

"But, John . . . !" It was still a protest, if something of the emphasis had gone out of it.

"I know," he said.

"In any case, I must see him first," Viva returned.

John, standing with his hands in his coat pockets and

his gaze still fixed on the house across the way, made no movement. "Does that really make any difference?" he asked. "Your seeing him, I mean? He may be better or worse than you think. I don't feel that that matters. I should like to save him, you know, if we can."

Viva bowed her head. How was it possible for her to be anything but good with John's example before her? She knew the story of his life, knew the kind of man his father had been in the old days at Cannes, and all that John had gone through. Yet he had no shade of rancor, nor any thought either of being magnanimous or of doing his duty. His desires and his statement were alike simple and direct.

And for her there could be no choice. She must do something more than merely put up with this horrible old man. She must face this last and most severe test; prove herself worthy of the trust John had in her; recover that fading enthusiasm for goodness; be fine, splendid; rejoice again in self-sacrifice. She had it in her to do all that when the opportunity was given her, and here was an opportunity worthy of a saint.

"I'm sorry, John dear," she said. "You're quite right. Of course we must save him, if we can."

John had a moment's reaction. Had he any right, he asked himself, to impose so great a burden upon her? "Viva, darling, you're almost too wonderful," he said. "I feel that I ought not to have asked you to do this. It's too much. No one but you would have agreed to it for a minute." He went across the room to her and knelt by her chair. He was ready to adore, and she no

less ready to accept his worship, more particularly on such an occasion as this, when she was conscious of being worthy of praise.

"But of course and of course, my dear," she said. "We must do all we can. Just for a moment, I admit, it was rather a shock to hear that he was not quite in his right mind; but there can't possibly be any question of what we want to do for him. Shall I take him back with me to Kensington Gate?"

She was, indeed, willing to do that, now; in a very ecstasy of goodness. She was uplifted, eager for the uttermost sacrifice. Jane might have frowned and made an effort to bring her sister down from those perilous heights of mystical virtue. John could only wonder and adore, although he would not for a moment consider her proposal of taking old Fortescue back to London with her.

Nor did the old man, himself, favor that idea when he was brought in to be introduced to his daughter-in-law. He was manifestly ill at ease in her presence, unable to strike any mean between an attempt at nonchalance, a pathetic travesty of his old jauntiness—and a distressing, almost revolting, humility. Viva spoke to him in English, and he was undoubtedly at his best when using the same tongue. It was then that some touch of the old boastfulness crept into his manner.

"It's uncommonly good of you, Mrs. John," was his beginning, "to take an interest in such an unhappy failure as myself. But, as my son has no doubt told you, I have been very unfortunate, very unfortunate."

That line would have done well enough, but he could

not maintain it; slipped back into French, and almost immediately became propitiatory and abject. Also, he appeared to be unaware that he was using language unfit for polite society—he had a particular weakness for the use of a verb that will not be found in Larousse. But neither in English nor in French was he favorable to the idea of being taken to London to live on the high level of manners and society proper to Kensington Gate. He was evidently sane enough to realize what would be required of him in that milieu.

"I'm afraid my health would not permit me," he explained in one of his more lucid intervals. "I—I have the habit, now, of being very much alone."

The truth was, as John and Viva were to become increasingly aware, that his desire was less for loneliness than immunity from all restraint. In his best days he had had a marked inclination in that direction. The dressing-gown with the cord that would never remain tied, had been a true indication of his weakness. He had begun by claiming the liberties allowed to an artist, but the nearest approach to that ideal of freedom he had striven for had been found when he reached the gutter. And now that he had been rescued, his natural inclination was to revert to his wallowing in the mire. He even tentatively suggested that on a small allowance he could keep himself very well in Paris. Mère Victorine's apartment was not actually mentioned, but John, suspecting that that would be his father's choice of habitation, vetoed that plan without hesitation.

"I'm going to take you up to Brittany," he said; "a place called Ploumanach. The air there will do you

good, and we shall all join you when we come over for our summer holiday. After that, we'll make some other arrangement. There's no reason why you shouldn't remain in France, if you prefer it."

Old Fortescue bowed his head and mumbled something that may have been either an acknowledgment of his gratitude or a submissive promise to come without making a fuss.

Viva insisted that she would come, too. This planting of her new cross on the coast of Brittany was making things almost too easy for her. And John did not oppose that suggestion; he was glad to have her almost to himself for a few days.

In the course of his short stay at the hotel, Mr. Fortescue behaved himself reasonably well. He took his meals whenever possible in his own room—the public restaurant imposed so many inhibitions that had long been relaxed, and was evidently a trial to him—but apart from a tendency to hobnob with the boots, for which John gently reproved him, he showed no sign of any serious relapse.

John and Viva settled him at Ploumanach in the temporary care of a respectable old couple who understood French and spoke it fairly intelligibly. They were tactfully warned not to let him drink too much, and were quite willing to do anything for money, both of them being tainted with the avarice of the Breton peasant. John and Viva, returning home by St. Malo and Southampton, were inclined to think that they had done the right thing.

"He'll be so much better for the splendid air," Viva

said. "I'm quite hopeful that he'll recover his mind after a week or two. And by then we shall be there to look after him. How old is he, actually, John?"

"Born in 'forty-four," John said. "That makes him fifty-eight this year."

"Seven years younger than father," Viva commented, "and he looks at least ten years older. He must have had an awful time, dear."

Yet, according to the evidence of old Fortescue himself, given when John and his family arrived at Ploumanach a fortnight later, the awful times he had had in Paris were joy compared with those he had had in Brittany. John had thought it prudent to leave him with very little money, and the whole village had apparently conspired together to prevent him from getting drunk. All that he had been able to obtain was cider, which, from his point of view, was little, if any, better than water. Furthermore, the Breton peasants did not understand his French, nor he theirs. They might almost as well have been Dutchmen, so far as old Fortescue was concerned.

Nevertheless, there could be no question that he had vastly improved. He was querulous and exceedingly discontented, but he looked younger, held himself better, and conducted long conversations in English without any lapse into argot. Except for the fact that his hands were dirty, and his general appearance slovenly, despite his new clothes, he was almost presentable.

The Fortescues and the Edward Mallorys had rooms in the hotel, but the old man was still in charge of the faithful Breton couple, who had, if anything, exceeded

their instructions, and were prepared to continue their stern guardianship indefinitely on the generous terms John was paying.

Edward, who was now a junior partner in a highly-respectable firm of stock-brokers, and fully conscious of the fact that he would one day wear the title of Lord Mallory, kept out of old Fortescue's way. To his wife, he professed sympathy for John. "Shocking bad luck on him to have a father like that," he said. "Don't know what he and Viva are going to do about it. Can't possibly bring him back to town, of course."

Mrs. Edward shrugged her shoulders. "Obviously," she agreed. "But one wonders a little if he can ever have been so very much better. Do you remember him when you were a boy?"

"Hardly at all," Edward said. "Just remember him, that's all. He used to wear whiskers, and put on French manners, as far as I recollect."

Mrs. Edward turned up her nose with an air of disgust. She had always been a little jealous of Viva, and meant to make the most of old Fortescue's undesirability.

She was greatly assisted in this object by the skill displayed by old Fortescue himself in stealing one of the two bottles of whisky that Edward had brought with him. Whether he had visited the Edward Mallorys' room at the hotel during their absence for that particular purpose, or rather, as John was inclined to believe, with the still more heinous intention of stealing money, is of little consequence. If he had stolen money he might have concealed his crime. As it was, the asso-

ciation of Edward's loss and old Fortescue's condition the same evening would have provided enough evidence to condemn him, even if John had not found the bottle.

Nothing could be done with him that night, but the next afternoon Viva took the old man out on to the cliff for a quiet talk. Her intention, as she explained to John, was not to reprove him, but to give him that sympathy and understanding he had always lacked. Edward and his little snob of a wife might think what they liked of her. The only real satisfaction one got out of life was by helping other people—especially if they were difficult and compromising people.

And, up to a certain point, she justified her method. The old man responded, acclaimed her as a saint, wept sentimental tears; and then, greatest triumph of all, rose for a few minutes to the bleak heights of honest confession. The after-effects of the whisky, a poison to which he was unaccustomed, may have been responsible for this unprecedented emergence of the naked spirit of Albert Fortescue, but it might never have been tempted from the secret places of its long seclusion if it had not been for Viva's sympathy.

The brief revelation that followed, however, should have sufficiently demonstrated that her method had come too late for any hope of ultimate success. Viva, misled by her own ecstasy, showed herself altogether too sanguine, telling John that she had made a "splendid beginning," whereas she should have known, as John rather despondently feared, that she had reached a climax she would never be able to reattain.

"He was perfectly frank with me, John dear," she

reported. "He told me that he never had been any good, and never would be; and that all he wanted now was to be given a small allowance and left alone. Any decent strain in him, he said, had been 'rotted out.' Minnie—that's Mrs. Ferrar, I suppose?—had kept him straight for a good many years, but he had been glad to be rid of her; although the worst time of all his life was after he had married Isabelle and gone to live in Nice. Oh! and he told me, John, that your mother had been a masterful woman—so I suppose that's where you get your strength of character from—and that he knew, a month after he had married her, that he could 'never stick it for long.' That was his phrase; he repeated it three or four times.

"And doesn't all that make it quite clear, darling," Viva continued enthusiastically, "that what he has really needed all these years is sympathy? I feel I've made a splendid beginning. Of course he feels just now that there's no hope for him; but don't you think we shall be able to give him hope, little by little?"

How could John discourage her; how, indeed, do anything but praise this shining enthusiasm for goodness? His own misgiving that Albert Fortescue had had a culminating moment of inspiration when he announced that any decent strain had been rotted out of him, must be resolutely suppressed. Viva knew far more than he did about such affairs as these; and he was probably quite wrong. In any case, she must do exactly what she thought best.

She certainly worked hard enough for the next few days. Mrs. Edward shrugged her shoulders and sug-

gested to her husband that they should take the boat from St. Brieuc and run over to St. Helier for a few days. She had never seen the Channel Islands, and now that Viva spent the whole of her time with that awful old man . . .

Edward thought it was a good idea. They could safely leave their two children with John and the governess.

Viva made no attempt to dissuade her brother and his wife from making that excursion. She was completely occupied by her efforts to save the soul, mind and body of Albert Fortescue. And it may be that one of the chief contributing causes of her failure was this very intensity.

Even sympathy may take the guise of a restraint if it be too demonstrative, and old Fortescue may have realized that all this regard for him might in the end prove a finer trammel than Isabelle's brutality. Also, behind all this present care for his happiness, loomed the spectre of a threat; he was being prepared for the life of convention and self-respect that he loathed. Had he not made it sufficiently clear in his moment of honesty that self-respect was the essential burden a man must cast before he can be quite free.

Edward and his wife had been gone for three days when Mr. Fortescue succeeded in making his escape after robbing his Breton guardians, Monsieur and Madame Proust, of some five hundred francs. They were not quite sure of the amount but that was their, probably too generous, estimate. They were terribly outraged by this crime, for although they might be

making a handsome profit out of John, on the actual theft, their remunerative goose had gone to lay its eggs elsewhere. Furthermore, their faith had been shaken; they had so firmly believed that the secret of their hiding-place was inviolable.

Viva would have returned with John to seek the old man at Mère Victorine's, where they fully expected to find him; but now that Edward and his wife were away it was impossible to leave the children. Her parting instructions laid emphasis on the need for sympathy. The set of John's expression had a hint of severity that she assured him was indicative of a wrong method.

"I'm quite sure I shall save him in time," she said. "This is just a reaction, after a period of restraint. I can understand it so well."

But John was given no opportunity to practise his sympathy on this occasion, for old Fortescue had not returned to Mère Victorine's. He believed her when she denied all knowledge of the runaway. John had treated her generously at the previous meeting, and made it plain from the outset that this time there was to be no reward until his father was found. He mentioned five hundred francs as a possible sum, and relied more upon the inquiries of Mère Victorine and her agents than upon those of the Paris police who were also taken into his confidence.

But whether influenced by a further reaction against the cool air of Brittany, or guessing that he would be immediately re-sought in Paris, old Fortescue had gone to Marseilles. John's first news of him, received two days before the end of his own broken holiday, was

contained in a water-soaked letter addressed to himself and forwarded by the Marseilles *commissaire de police*. It had been found, the *commissaire* explained, in the pocket of an old man who had been drowned in Marseilles harbor. The body, he added, was in the morgue awaiting identification.

Going south, John awoke at Lyons with a sudden sense of living again the boyish emotions he had experienced when he first made that journey nearly twenty years earlier. In that time, it seemed to him, there had been no change in the condition nor even in the smell of the Midi Express. He was greeted by the same sounds. In imagination he could recover his old excitement at hearing his father mention the Rhone. But in the interval he had added so much work to the tapestry of his life, while his father had completed his poor record of descent from depth to depth of failure and ignominy by a chance fall into the muddy water of Marseilles harbor. It was almost certainly an accident. There had been no hint of suicide in his last letter. It had contained nothing but a request for money and the plea to be left alone. He had probably been either drunk at the time or suffering from the effects of a heavy bout of drinking. It was evident that he had run through all the money stolen from the Prousts in something less than three weeks.

Was the pattern of all these strange tapestries known to some Almighty Architect from the beginning, John wondered; or had every man and woman the power to alter in some degree the design of his or her own record? So far as he could see his own future promised no

further dramatic developments. All that remained was little more than a filling in of the background. A few clouds there might be hidden in the tight roll of canvas of which no man can catch any glimpse until time shall disclose it as a register of things accomplished; but surely the great drama of his life had already been played.

The Midi Express was making its unheralded, almost stealthy, departure from Lyons station when it flashed across John's mind that that old tapestry of Joshua he had never completed was probably lost. He could not remember having seen it in the course of the move from Acacia Road to Kensington Gate. For a moment, he had a keen sense of loss and distress. He determined that he would institute a search when he returned to London. Some day, when he was an old man perhaps, he might finish that work. He smiled at the thought of his old ambition to "get up to God."

CHAPTER XIX

1902-1912

VIVA, who was able to understand so well the nature of the reaction that had urged her pitiable father-in-law to fly from all restraint, did not recognize the same symptoms in herself when she turned back into the life of society in the course of the winter following that Ploumanach holiday. Her responses were less sudden, less dramatic. Old Fortescue had exhibited marked symptoms that were easy to classify. Viva's recoil was so gradual that no one realized her change of direction until months after the reaction had begun.

Nevertheless her symptoms were similar in kind to those of the hopeless old man she had tried to save. In those high moments of inspiration at Ploumanach she had in anticipation renounced the world of her London life. However successful she might be, she could never hope to introduce her father-in-law into society. Even in the old days at St. Edmund's Terrace, he had been barely presentable. And she had been willing to make a drastic choice between the alternatives, to give up her amusements, drop a large proportion of her acquaintances and devote herself to the great work of salvation. She had, indeed, counted herself lucky to have been given so convenient an opportunity for self-sacrifice.

And then God had unaccountably destroyed the cross she had been willing to embrace. The responsibility had not been hers. She had nothing with which to reproach herself. All that she could possibly do she had done, readily, eagerly, with a full heart. It seemed that fate, or whoever was directing the affair, had not intended her to make that sacrifice.

For a few weeks after her return to Kensington Gate, she was more than usually devoted to John and the two children. She even contemplated the prospect of taking up rescue work with some society, and now and again reflected gravely that perhaps her true calling had been that of a nun. But all these fine intentions and reflections were dissipated by unnoticeable degrees, as people began to come back to town. She was half-consciously aware of a feeling of relief at the thought that she had not, after all, to face the difficulties and embarrassments that would have been necessitated by a constant attendance upon old Fortescue. And so, gradually, with a free conscience and a light heart, she dipped further into the excitements of London life than she had ever done before.

Mrs. Edward was more jealous than ever, and although she told every one the story of the disreputable father-in-law, no one seemed to be seriously influenced by it. The man had been a composer—one still heard that jolly song *The Flood Tide* occasionally—and musicians were often a trifle queer. If he had been there, a visible skeleton in the house at Kensington Gate, the case would have been different; but since he was dead, his unfortunate tendency to alcoholism was not of the

least consequence. As a posthumous scandal, old Fortescue fell uncommonly flat.

Looking back over those years between 1902 and 1912, John found it impossible to indicate any period at which Viva's ambitions toward "goodness" had definitely failed. They had, it seemed, imperceptibly slipped away without his noticing any change in her character. Only by contrasting the brilliant, rather hard woman of 1912 with the Viva he so vividly remembered of ten years earlier, could he convince himself that in those ten years she had indeed altered very considerably.

It was more difficult still to trace the development of any change in their relations as man and wife. Sometimes he was not sure if there had been any real change. In sixteen years—they had been married for nearly sixteen years in June, 1912—the edge had gone from their first eager passion for each other. That was bound to be. But he was still deeply in love with her, and, allowing for the differences in their temperament, she was, he thought, almost equally in love with him.

He had always trusted her absolutely; always would trust her. She had had her little affairs with various men, upon which he had smiled indulgently. He did not mind if it amused her. Unhappily there were long periods during which he hardly saw her between breakfast time and one or two o'clock the next morning; and he was glad that she should not be dependent upon him for amusement.

Once some one had sent him an unsigned letter of the usual type, alleging that Viva was the mistress of a

well-known man about town, and citing various evidence. She had been seen here and there with him, the writer said, had visited him alone at his chambers in Jermyn Street. John threw the letter over to her with an indulgent smile.

Viva had read it calmly, and had then said, "Of course, you don't believe a word of it?"

"Well, naturally, I don't," had been his equally calm reply.

"No, naturally, you wouldn't," she had said. "But it's unpleasant all the same. I must drop him for my own sake, in any case."

And then she had come across the room, had kissed him fondly and called him her "wonderful John."

They had never had a serious quarrel. The nearest they had ever come to it had been when Viva had insisted upon Bobby's name being put down for Eton. John had refused quietly but very definitely. Bobby had something of his mother's temperament, and John was quite convinced that Eton was not the school for him. Viva had been determined to have her own way on that occasion, had scarcely spoken to John for two days, and when he had pleaded with her, had said: "Well, will you agree to send Bobby to Eton?"

John had shaken his head, not angrily nor impatiently, but with that steady determination of his which there was no moving. "No, I won't agree to that," he had said; "because I'm sure it wouldn't be good for him."

And then, all at once, Viva had given way, and had generously admitted that he was perfectly right. After

that, they had seemed almost to recover the old fervor for a time.

Bobby had eventually gone to Westminster School as a day boy.

Peterson had retired from the partnership in 1906. He was sixty-two, and had announced that he had now more than enough money to live on for the rest of his life, and meant to travel and enjoy himself. His three children were grown up and provided for. His son, who had preferred engineering to architecture, was doing very well. His father's firm was in a position to put quite a lot of work in his way. His two daughters were comfortably married. There was nothing to keep him and his wife from doing now what they ought to have done when they were young, that is to say, see the world. He would have gone before if it had not been for his devotion to his work.

His going had made a great difference to John, financially; for Peterson had refused absolutely to be bought out or to draw any further profit from the business.

"My dear chap," he had said; "I don't want more money than I've got. I don't really want as much." And he added: "I have always been a cautious investor, and my income is as safe as it can be in this uncertain world of ours. But if, by any unforeseen combination of circumstances, the British Empire goes to pot—I've got all my eggs in that basket, and at present it looks likely to hold 'em safely—why, I'll come down on you, if you haven't been let in, too, by the smash. You're the sort of fellow, after all, who might survive the col-

lapse of Europe. Unless, of course, you do something unexpected. I think the chances of that are less than they once were, but you've still got it in you. To do what? God knows. Something inconceivable. I've got no logical reason for saying it; but I've always felt it in you. You might, for instance, conceive it to be your duty to set fire to Burlington House."

John had grinned complacently. "It's true. I might," he had said.

Yet within eight years both the eventualities Peterson had so lightly indicated came to pass. John did something, unexpected, inconceivable; and British securities, if not the British Empire, collapsed. Nevertheless, Peterson survived both calamities.

Viva was thirty-eight at the time of the first of these two tragedies; a beautiful, slender woman still, full of charm when she wished, capable of great dignity; reasonably rich, admired and respected; the mother of a brilliant if slightly irresponsible son of thirteen, and of a grave, earnest daughter whose devotion to music and skill as a pianist were quite remarkable in a child of her age. Viva was, also, wife of a devoted husband who would almost certainly give her the right to a minor title one of these days. If the Prime Minister were looking about for a worthy recipient for the honor of knighthood, outside political interests and the Civil Service, John Fortescue's work certainly entitled him to early recognition. He had been responsible for one or two important government buildings.

Nevertheless, despite all her gifts and advantages, Viva was suffering from a secret trouble. She was

bored; terribly bored. All her days were occupied, and yet she had nothing to do; nothing that was fresh and interesting, nothing that would absorb her attention and her energies. And "goodness," as an end in itself, no longer appealed to her. She had had so little practise since old Fortescue died, and now looked back upon her old yearning for self-sacrifice as a freakish impulse of her earlier youth.

CHAPTER XX

THE CRIME

IT WAS in May, 1912, that John met Basil Cheney again, after an interval of sixteen years. The Armenian had not succeeded as an architect in London, despite his influential connection. His style, whether social or architectural, had been something too florid for English taste; and some twelve months after he had been turned out of the house in Queen's Gate, he had gone to Berlin, had found there the appreciation England had denied him, and had eventually become a naturalized German subject.

John came across him at an International Congress organized by the Royal Institute of British Architects and found him little changed. Indeed, when John caught sight of him in the crowd, he experienced again the old sense of bitter dislike, of repugnance, although they two were no longer rivals, either in love or in architecture, as they had once been. John would have avoided him had it been possible, but Cheney took the initiative and was not to be put off by the distant bow with which John returned the apparently delighted salutation proffered by the Armenian when he caught sight of John on the other side of the room.

Certainly Cheney had altered little in any essential.

He was as smartly dressed as ever, as effusive in manner, and his long residence in Germany had done nothing to mitigate the English accent he had originally learned at Harrow. There was even a touch of the old condescension in his voice as he said:

"Delighted to meet you again, after all this time, Fortescue. I understand that you're a very successful man, these days."

John shrugged his shoulders. "You've done pretty well, too, in Berlin, I hear," he replied coldly.

"More scope for originality there than in London, you know," Cheney explained, still with that faint suggestion of patronage. "The Germans are a truly cosmopolitan people. They are far more open to foreign influence than the English; and therefore more truly artistic. Don't you agree?"

"No idea," John said. "I've never been in Germany."

"Ah!" Cheney shook his head, and his exclamation held a note of remonstrance as if he reproved the successful but insular Fortescue for his narrowness of outlook. "But you've done work in Paris," he continued.

"Quite a lot," John admitted.

"I've seen some of it," Cheney commented; "and found it, if you will forgive the criticism, a little too severe for its surroundings."

"Possibly," John returned, adding, "Excuse me, there's some one over there I want to speak to, before the meeting."

Cheney held out his hand. "Delighted to meet you again, Fortescue," he said blandly. "Please remember

me to your wife. I'm not in town for long, and don't know whether I shall find time to call."

For a few minutes the thought of having to be polite to the fellow, should he have the impudence to turn up at Kensington Gate, remained in John's mind as a distasteful possibility; but he had forgotten all about him when four days later Viva said, as she was dressing to go out for dinner: "Who do you think I met at Queen's Gate this afternoon? The man you were so terribly rude to, on a certain occasion. Do you remember? He lives in Berlin now, he told me. I've asked him to come to lunch on Sunday."

"Then you must put him off. I won't have him here," John said in a tone that Viva had never heard before.

"My dear John!" she expostulated. "Why? What's the matter? I can't possibly put him off, now. Why should I?"

"I detest the fellow. Always have," John returned. "And I won't have him in my house."

"But . . ." Viva began, and then set her mouth and turned back to her toilet table. This was not the cool resolution she had encountered on one or two earlier occasions, the steady unshakable refusal of a John whose reason and sense of rectitude had alike been convinced. There had been anger, unreasonable, tremulous anger in his voice; he who had never been really angry with her in all their married life. He was such a steadfast, self-controlled man.

And his anger, she found, did not intimidate her, beat her down, as did his calm resolution. The image of

herself that she saw in the looking-glass, was smiling with more than a hint of mischief.

John, also, saw that smile, and it did not tend to pacify him.

"You understand, Viva," he said sharply. "You've got to put him off. I won't have him here."

"If I might have some reason for so extraordinary a proceeding?" she suggested, without changing her expression of demure amusement.

"I've given you one," John said. "I detest the man."

"Oh! I know. You always have," she returned. "But I don't."

Somewhere at the back of John's mind was a recognition of the fact that he ought to be reasonable; that in the past he had always had his own way when he had been convinced that it was the right way; and that if he wished to be obeyed now, he must recover his normal attitude. But he was incapable of assuming an attitude that he did not feel; and all that he felt at the moment was an impatient desperate anger; not alone against Basil Cheney, but also against Viva herself.

"If he comes, I shall turn him out of the house, as I did before at Queen's Gate," he said, raising his voice as if he would beat down her opposition by sheer strength.

"Oh! Very well. Don't shout," Viva replied coolly. "Is the car there?"

It was John apparently who had triumphed in that encounter; but it was Viva who had the sense of victory. She had a queer feeling of triumph, of power. She had found this strong compelling husband of hers

vulnerable; and it gave her an odd thrilling pleasure to know that she was able to wound him.

They were dining out together that night, and before they reached their destination, John's sudden flare of passion had cooled. He laid his hand on Viva's arm. "Sorry, darling," he said. "I don't know quite what there is about that fellow that makes me so angry."

"Nor I," Viva returned.

"But you won't have him to lunch on Sunday?"

"Certainly not, if you threaten to turn him out," she said.

"I'm afraid I couldn't help it," John admitted.

"Personally, I find him rather charming," Viva replied, and felt John's hand tremble and tighten on her arm.

"Please don't say that," he begged her.

"But I do," she said. "And my dear John, please don't mark my arm. You know how easily my skin bruises."

She was playing with fire and knew it; but she found it quite a thrilling amusement after the boredom she was accustomed to; something that was, at last, really worth doing.

She was not in to lunch on the following Sunday, and John had a faint misgiving that he fought against and succeeded, he believed, in stifling. He was reading to the two children in the drawing-room when Viva came in at half past three, and though he looked up with a hint of inquiry in his face when she entered, he intended to ask her no question as to where she had been.

But Viva did not wait to be asked. "I've been lunch-

ing with Basil Cheney at my club," she announced, sitting down and beginning to strip off her gloves. Her tone was careless, but she did not look at John as she spoke.

For a moment he sat perfectly still as if he had not properly gathered the meaning of her words; then curtly told the two children to leave the room. They looked at him in astonishment.

"But why, daddy?" Bobby began to remonstrate.

"Go. Go, when I tell you," John said impatiently; and they went without further delay. Their going was almost a flight. Never had he spoken to them in that tone before.

John was already on his feet, and as the door closed behind the two children, he took two or three steps toward Viva. Both his tone and his attitude were passionate and menacing as he said:

"Now understand, Viva, I forbid you, absolutely forbid you, ever to see that cad again."

She felt the power of his anger, but she was not yet intimidated. She had a good and sufficient defense in reserve. And she resented his command and the manner of it, as she had never resented his convinced resolution, when at other times he had imposed his will upon hers.

"Indeed?" she replied nonchalantly.

John's fists were clenched, and the muscular constraint he was exercising made his whole body just perceptibly tremble.

"You understand," was all he could say.

"My dear man, be reasonable!" Viva said.

"I can't; I can't," John almost shouted. "I can't be reasonable until you promise that you'll do as I tell you."

He was dangerous. She saw that. If she pushed him too far, he might do something insane. The trembling of his body had increased; his eyes had an expression that was not quite human.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "there's not the least chance of my ever seeing Mr. Cheney again. He's going back to Berlin this evening."

The tensity of John's attitude relaxed. He stood still for a few moments, appearing to weigh the full import of her words, and then began slowly to pace the room.

"Yes, but that's not enough," he began, after a long two minutes' silence. "I'm not satisfied with that. He might come over again at any time. Besides, it's the principle of the thing. What I want is your promise."

"And if I won't give it?" she put in.

"You *must* give it," he replied, without interrupting his deliberate march up and down the room. "I insist."

"Even if you have to bully me into it?" she commented.

"Yes. Whatever I may have to do."

"And what might that mean?" she asked.

"I can't say." His tone was cooler now; but there was in it an undercurrent of passionate intensity that was new to her. And for the moment, she did not care to press him further.

"It's utterly absurd," she said, rising and picking up her gloves and little hand-bag from the arm of the chair. "I think you're being exceedingly stupid and

ill-mannered without the ghost of any excuse. But," her voice rose to a note of contempt, "I give you my promise for what it's worth."

Apparently he was not quite content with that. "You promise me, absolutely, never to see that man again?" he insisted.

"Oh! yes, if you like," she returned, as she went out.

It was not until she was in her own bedroom that she realized her defeat. Her new amusement had been taken from her by force, after such a very brief enjoyment of it. John had had no excuse for losing his temper so disgustingly; nor any right to inflict his utterly unreasonable commands upon her. And she wanted, yes, she definitely wanted, to meet Basil Cheney again, as he had suggested she might so easily do, in Paris. He was amusing and—exciting. And in a life that promised nothing but an indefinite extension and exaggeration of her present boredom, any excitement was an immense temptation.

For a few minutes she contemplated the prospect of going back to John and withdrawing her promise. She did not go because she was afraid. She had given in, at the end, because she had been afraid. And she strongly resented the fact that she had been bullied into giving that promise.

That thought stayed with her and rankled.

Outwardly, she and John resumed their ordinary relations without any further allusion to the topic of their first real quarrel. It seemed as if John, too, were afraid to speak of it again. But Viva knew that something had gone from her feeling for him; something of respect.

Now and then she thought of him as of a bully whom she was at liberty to deceive if she could; whom she had the right to cheat.

And the London season, eternally the same, stretched before her with its usual promise of infinite boredom. Once or twice she seriously contemplated the thought of taking up some new and absorbing form of "goodness"; but could think of no form dramatic enough to be tempting.

It was the middle of June when she announced to John, at breakfast, that she would like to go to Paris for a few days to buy some new frocks.

"Rather. It'll be a change for you," he agreed readily. Since that scene in the drawing-room, he had been obviously anxious to please her in little things. "You'll stay at the Beauvallon, as usual, I suppose?" he asked.

Viva hesitated a moment before she replied: "Oh! yes, of course."

The Fortescues were well known at the Beauvallon, a comfortable hotel near the Grands Boulevards, that was not too expensive. "I shall have number thirty-seven, the one with a sitting-room, if I can get it," she added. "No chance of your coming over, I suppose?"

"None whatever, I'm afraid," John replied reluctantly.

He was even more than usually busy just then, and more than a week later, when he received a cable from his Paris clerk-of-the-works requesting his presence on the job, his first reaction was one of annoyance. For the moment he did not remember that he would see Viva in Paris. He had almost decided to cable back

"Impossible"—the Paris clerk-of-the-works was something of an alarmist, and the affair was probably not urgent—when the thought of Viva came to him. It was Friday morning; he could get away by the four o'clock train from Victoria; do his work on Saturday morning and spend the whole of Saturday afternoon and the best part of Sunday with her; perhaps persuade her to come back with him.

His train was late in arriving at the Gare du Nord, and it was an hour after midnight when he reached the Beauvallon. It was a quiet hotel, and he had to ring up the night-porter before he could gain admittance. Fortunately the porter, when he appeared, was well-known to John, and there were no troublesome explanations to be made.

"Madame was almost certainly up-stairs," the porter said. He had been on duty since eleven o'clock, and she had not come in since then; but she was never out late. Number thirty-seven? "Yes! Monsieur's usual suite."

John dismissed the porter at the gate of the lift on the second floor. He did not want to disturb Viva if she were asleep.

There were two doors giving on to the corridor. When John and Viva stayed there, they always kept the bedroom door locked at night, but left the sitting-room door open so that the maid could bring in the coffee and rolls in the morning.

To-night, however, he found that the sitting-room door was also locked. Perhaps Viva was more nervous when she was alone.

He tapped gently, and became aware of an instant

effect of silence. Yet he could not remember having heard any sound that had ceased at his knock, unless it were that of his own feet along the corridor.

He waited a few seconds and then tapped again, more boldly.

This time the response was instantaneous—the sound of Viva's voice, in a high anxious note, inquiring in French who was there.

He went back to the bedroom door. "It's me—John," he said in a suppressed tone. "I was cabled for, and thought . . ." He paused, conscious once more of that effect of intense silence—as if the whole hotel were holding its breath. It seemed, indeed, to last for quite a long time before he heard Viva's voice again, quite close to him now, on the other side of the panel.

"Come to the other door," she said, and stopped with a faint gasp, as if she had caught her breath, before she added. "I'll come directly. I must get something on."

He had startled her; wakened her out of her first sleep, John reflected, as he waited for her. But she was a long time putting on that "something" which might surely have been of the simplest seeing that she had to admit no one but the husband to whom she had been married for sixteen years.

Distantly he heard the sound of a key being very cautiously turned. Had she then, he wondered, locked the door between the bedroom and the sitting-room also? He had not guessed that she was so nervous. And, even after that, a few more seconds elapsed before he heard the door of communication opened and

firmly closed again. He was tired and a trifle impatient. He was vaguely conscious of the feeling that Viva was not glad to see him.

But when at last he was admitted to the sitting-room, she was unusually effusive.

"My dear John," she said, speaking, he thought, unnecessarily loudly. "How very unexpected. Delighted to see you, of course, but at this hour of the night. I was oh, so sound, so very sound asleep. I'd been having such a day with the dressmaker. But it was worth it. Oh! let me tell you . . ."

She came up to him as she spoke and laid her hands on his shoulders. Her face was very flushed, and that, combined with her high rapid speech, aroused a sudden suspicion in John's mind that she had been drinking too much wine.

"How flushed you are, Viva," he interrupted her.

"I was dreaming when you woke me," she replied with a little laugh; and although her face was now close to his, she still spoke in a raised voice as if he were slightly deaf. "But do let me tell you about my frocks . . ."

He had a queer sense of repulsion, and tried to draw away from her, but she moved with him, keeping her hands on his arms. He was almost sure now that she had been drinking. It was unlike Viva to appear so completely unconscious of the strangeness of her own manner. Or could she possibly have been taking drugs?

And then, above the high rapid tones of her voice, he heard with a horrible distinctness the sound of a sharp

click, as of some light object falling on the parquet of the inner room.

Viva broke suddenly into a half-hysterical laugh. "Such a queer thing happened yesterday," she said, more loudly than ever. "Do let me tell you . . ."

But John had heard enough. In that moment he knew the truth, with a force and certainty beyond the reach of any further attempt at deception. It seemed to him as if the complete incident, from his first knock to the falling of that object in the other room, were presented to him in a flash, as an instantaneous whole.

He wrenched his arms away from Viva's grasp, and tried to push past her, but she sprang back and clung to him.

"It was only my comb that fell," she said breathlessly. "I remember now that I left it on the edge . . ."

She could get no further than that, for John had laid his hands on her shoulders and thrust her from him with such violence that she staggered across the room and fell against the end of the chesterfield by the wall.

A strange sense of quietness, almost of elation, had come upon him. When he flung open the bedroom door and saw Basil Cheney in his pajamas and a dressing-gown bending over the lock of the door that gave access to the corridor, he was aware not only of relief in the knowledge that he was not too late, but, also, of a wonderful clarity of mind. He guessed instantly that Viva had forgotten that ingenuity of French locks which permits the key to be turned twice, that she had but half unlocked the door and that Cheney was attempting

to complete her work without making any sound. Also, John knew that the man was sick and weak with sheer fright, fumbling and paralyzed before every obstacle, with the impotence of one in a dream.

Nevertheless, he stood up and faced John as he entered. "I say—look here——" he began; and then struck out wildly, convulsively, harmlessly, as John came at him.

Some strength, however, must have returned to Cheney before consciousness left him. John, from the heights of the great determination that irresistibly thrust him forward, seemed distantly to perceive rather than to feel the blows that were rained upon him, and the distressing stream of blood that he could not account for, came from his own nose. But all these phenomena were merely witnessed, as it were, from the outside.

The single real fact in his existence at that moment was his thrusting grip on Cheney's throat; all that mattered was the fierce satisfying pressure of his two thumbs on a windpipe that gradually offered less and less resistance. He did not know that Cheney had fallen face upward on the floor, nor that he himself had gained thereby to add the weight of his body to the grip of his hands. He came quite slowly, by unrecognized degrees, as if he were recovering from a deep anæsthesia, to the realization that the man underneath him was dead, and that his own hands and arms were aching intolerably.

Yet, even now that he had come back into life, that strange deep quietness remained with him. He felt com-

posed, protected from all attacks of pain or fear; no longer elated, but conscious of having done that which had to be done.

He walked across to the mirror in the wardrobe, contemplated for a moment the stains of blood about his nose, mouth and chin; then deliberately entered the *cabinet-de-toilette* giving out of the bedroom, turned on the light, washed his face and soaked his hot strained hands in cold water.

After that there was Viva to be seen to, he reflected.

She was still lying on the floor by the chesterfield. She was unhurt, but she had fainted in the act of falling. He laid her out on her back, methodically arranged her night-dress and wrapper, and then returned to the cabinet for a glass of cold water and a sponge.

He had been automatically sponging her temples for some minutes before she opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"You'll be all right, directly," he said quietly; adding, foolishly, as he quite well knew, but the words came from some source over which he had not yet recovered control: "I thought you were drunk."

"John!" She put her hand to her wet forehead and then sat up. "What have you done? Tell me, quickly. Have you . . . ? Is he . . . ?"

"Dead? Oh! yes, he's quite dead," John replied in a cool even voice. "I suppose I ought to send for the police."

"The police!" Still sitting on the floor, but leaning her back now against the seat of the chesterfield, she stared at him as if she were trying desperately to un-

derstand what he meant. "But couldn't you escape?" she asked, after a long silence.

John was already opening the door, but he turned and looked at her with a faintly contemptuous smile, as he said: "Escape? What for?"

Then she heard his steps, very firm and deliberate, retreating steadily down the corridor toward the lift.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTERMATH

THE second tragedy, the quite inevitable tragedy, as it seemed to Lord and Lady Mallory when they read their daughter's letter, followed the first after an interval of only a few hours.

The letter had presumably been written sometime between six and seven o'clock in the morning; after John had been taken away, the body of Basil Cheney removed, and all the police had gone, save the one gendarme who was posted in the corridor to prevent Madame Fortescue from leaving the hotel. She had rung the bell and given a cable to the chambermaid just before seven o'clock; and a few seconds later had passed out of the hotel herself by a road that is free from all human surveillance. Indeed, the gendarme who was at the other end of the corridor just then, flirting with the maid to whom the cable had been given, had not heard the crack of the small revolver that had served Viva Fortescue as the key for her escape. No one knew she had gone till more than an hour later.

Poor Lord and Lady Mallory, so urgently summoned by the few words "Come at once, both of you," were entirely unprepared for the horror that awaited them. Even if they had looked for news, they would have

found none in the morning edition of the Paris journals; and their French not being of the best, they did not fully realize all that had so terribly happened until they had read Viva's letter.

She had begun dramatically, hurriedly, as if she had but a few moments to spare:

I can't face it. I can't face you nor the children nor John. Chiefly, I can't face myself. I've got my little revolver here and that will kill me quickly if I'm careful. I can feel the place where my heart is quite easily because it's beating so loud. The revolver is best. It must be something very quick. I could not die slowly . . .

Probably she had paused there, and her thoughts had turned to herself and what the future, if there were a future, might possibly hold for her. All that followed was written more steadily and clearly, and was meant apparently, partly as a frank confession, partly as a piece of self-vindication.

It wasn't just sheer wickedness on my part. He had always tempted me, and I should have married him if it had not been for John. John was always a kind of ideal for me; even long ago before he came back from France. I don't know that I ever really loved him. I'm not sure that I've ever loved any one very, very deeply—nor wanted to. But John always made me feel so proud of myself, and so good. I wanted, sometimes, so terribly to be good—not just respectable and pious, but a kind of saint. I could be, too, for months, even years, at a stretch; only, if there wasn't any way of showing it and getting praised for it, the feeling wore

off. John always praised me for it, of course; but that didn't help much when I felt I hadn't earned it. I ought to have gone into a convent. I believe I could have kept it up, if it had been difficult enough. I got no satisfaction out of being good when it was easy.

Oh! poor John, poor John! And there's nothing I can do for him now. I suppose he would take me back if he could. I know he'd forgive me, but I suppose he'll be in prison for years. I thought it all out while those detestable policemen were all over the place. They would keep speaking to me, so I pretended to have forgotten all my French. I could *not* answer them just then, and I lay on the chesterfield and wondered if I could be good enough to look after the children somewhere abroad, and wait and wait until he came out. I might have if he had come four days sooner. But he came too late, much too late, and that makes all the difference. I should never be able to get rid of my loathsome memories. Oh! how I hate the thought of Basil, now. I did not know before how furiously I could hate any one. I had begun to hate him even before John came. If he had come on Saturday instead of Friday, it would have been all right. No, it wouldn't. I couldn't have gone back to him again with those memories of mine between us. I wonder if I shall meet Basil again, over there? Oh! I hope not. I hope not.

I know why I go on writing all this. It's to put off the moment when I've got to do it. Some kind of excuse, I suppose. But I shall do it all right. I know that I shall do it.

My dear father and mother, you will look after John, won't you, and do everything you can for him? You must not blame him for what he did. He couldn't help it. He knew somehow about Basil, always, from the beginning; even though he didn't know himself why he hated him. John is really good, not my sort of goodness, because he doesn't try to be good. He can't help

it. Only sometimes there is something that gets hold of him, as it did when he burned my picture—a sort of righteous rage. He couldn't bear the thought that any one who liked could come and stare at my portrait. I wanted him to make love to me that night, but he wouldn't. Do look after him. Get Jane to come over; she understands him quite as well as I do. She has always been in love with him, of course. The best thing that could happen would be for them to get married when he comes out. Perhaps he won't be in prison for very long. They are very lenient about crimes of that sort in Paris.

I must do it now, as soon as I've sent off my cable to you. My heart has begun to beat again. It will be quite easy, and very quick. I'm not really so very much afraid, and there's no possible alternative. I couldn't possibly go on living. I'm too selfish. Even my goodness, I suppose, was chiefly egotism. VIVA.

Be very gentle with John.

Lady Mallory found it easier to obey that parting injunction than did her husband. Some shadow of the old rancor still lurked in his mind. If the occasion had been less immensely tragical he might have been tempted to say: "There was always something I rather distrusted about the fellow." As it was, he conscientiously did his best. At seventy-three, Lord Mallory showed no sign of approaching senility. He was as upright as ever, and as clear-minded. His splendid crop of hair and handsome beard were still gray rather than white; and he had two pictures in that season's Academy. His wife's hair was exquisitely white; but she, too, carried her years very well. Her husband's latest portrait of her (as the Roman matron in the famous

group of *The Three Ages*) exhibits very clearly the likeness between her and the granddaughter who is playing at ball on the Terrace. And the portrait of the granddaughter, painted from Edward's elder girl, who was now fifteen, might equally well have been done from Lady Mallory at the same age.

But there were two people whose appearance in Paris at that time was of even more solace to John than the gentle sweetness of his mother-in-law. The first was Jane, who went off at once of her own initiative after reading the news in a London evening paper; and who did not until some days later receive the letter from her father, in which he gravely advised her to do whatever she thought best.

The other person was Peterson, who arrived two days later from High-Savoy; and at once relieved John of one of the two anxieties that still weighed upon him after he had heard of Viva's suicide. (He had had the first news of that from the magistrate on the Saturday morning.) Peterson was quite willing, seemed, indeed, quite uncommonly glad, to go over to London and take charge of the affairs of the office.

"Lord, my dear John," he said; "it'll be a relief to me, a positive relief, to have something definite to do once more. Only a week ago I was talking to Mary and asking her if she thought you'd take me on again as a junior partner, or even as an unpaid assistant. Yes; yes; of course, I'll take charge of everything until you come back."

"I shall never come back," John replied. He said it gravely, but not more gravely than everything else he

had said since the magistrate had told him that Viva was dead. It was evident that once his arrangements were made, he had no further interest in what might happen to him.

"Of course you will. Of course you will," Peterson said. "You realize, surely, that at the very most you will get two years' detention for this. You may get that, being an Englishman, even for a crime *passionel;* but certainly not more."

John nodded, as if the matter of his probable sentence was not of the least importance.

"And then you will want a preoccupation," Peterson persisted; trying to rouse him from his immense detachment. "There will be no reason whatever why you should not come back. Besides which, there are your two children to be thought of."

But John had already provided for them, entrusting their future with a perfect confidence not to their grandmother, but to Jane. Just at that moment he felt sure that he would never see either of his children ever any more. He would not have suffered too greatly in meeting the little Jane. He would not have felt embarrassed in seeing her; nor suffered any pain that might break through this vast impersonal calm that had enwrapped him ever since he had murdered Basil Cheney.

But Bobby he dared not meet again. The very thought of Bobby tore at his heart. The little Jane he loved with the warm solicitude of a father; Bobby with something of the overwhelming devotion he had had for Viva. They were so alike those two, and now all the

tenderness, all the love he had to give was for his little son. Only, John felt that he could never bear to see him again, to watch those gestures he had copied from his mother, hear the tones of her voice in her son's speech; and then to remember . . . to remember not the happiness of their married life, but the sight of her crouched, silent and aloof, on the corner of the chesterfield, while he had so stolidly, so heartlessly, gone about the business of informing the police and surrendering himself to their custody.

It had not been heartlessness on his part. He had believed that she no longer cared for him, and would prefer to be left alone.

And how could he possibly have guessed that she would do what she had done? No suspicion of it had ever occurred to him, nor, he believed, to the police. She had not, so far as he knew, had to submit to any personal search. The rooms themselves had been searched with an astonishing and perfectly useless thoroughness; and she must have had her little revolver in the pocket of her dressing-gown. It may well have been, John thought, that she had picked it up deliberately before she came out of the bedroom, afraid either that Cheney might use it, or John himself, if she were unable to prevent them from seeing each other.

And now for the rest of his life he must keep company with the knowledge that he might have saved her. If he had spoken to her, had told her what even then was becoming more and more clear to him, his willingness to forgive her, to take her away, afterward, to any place she wished, where they might hide from the

world, share her life as a brother might share the life of his sister; she would surely have waited until his trial was over. For John, although he had said nothing of that to the Mallorys, to Peterson, nor even to Jane, knew with a reasonable certainty that the French law would not punish him by even a week's detention.

Viva's last letter had found its way into the hands of the *juge d'instruction,* and it was the kindness of that official which had permitted John to see it. And of the two of them, there together, it had been the judge who had been more openly affected. Even by that time he had conceived a distinct liking for John. He spoke French so well; he had been so straightforward, so direct, so honest in his replies. And the murdered man had been a German subject. The judge, who was a man of culture and could read English, had had great difficulty in controlling his emotion, when he had passed that pathetic letter over to the prisoner.

And it was probably the kindness and consideration of the *juge d'instruction* that were responsible for the hastening of the actual trial, which might so easily not have taken place before October. It lasted for two days only, and every Frenchman in the court knew from the beginning that John's acquittal was a foregone conclusion.

John's *avocat* arranged his case very well. He began by producing two witnesses from the personnel of the Beauvallon, who testified as to John's devotion to his wife. From that he proceeded to indicate the development of Cheney's intrigue; explaining that he had come to the hotel the day before Madame Fortescue, and that

they had met publicly in the salon, as casual acquaintances, on the night of Madame Fortescue's arrival. They had spoken in French and had been overheard; but afterward they had never taken meals together, had only once been known to enter the hotel in each other's company; and Cheney had never been seen in Madame Fortescue's private suite until the night of the crime.

The inference to be drawn from all this, according to the *avocat,* was that Cheney was the seducer, and that his victim had yielded suddenly on the very night that John had arrived. Her letter was in evidence to show that the man had always tempted her, but it was made to appear that she had met him by accident, and given way only after a struggle. Finally the bruises on John's face, seen by the police, the magistrate, and even later by the *juge d'instruction,* were brought to witness that there had been a fierce struggle, that the prisoner had acted in the first instance in self-defense, and had more or less accidently killed his man in a passion of physical pain and jealousy.

There were two people in court who might have upset the essentials of this case as outlined by the *avocat.* The first was the *procureur de la Republique,* who, however, made no attempt to question them, and confined himself in his chief speech to a not too-impassioned attack upon the principle of the unwritten law, and the inadvisability of permitting the perpetrators of crimes in this category to go unpunished.

The other person was John himself, who seemed to take no interest in what was being said, hardly to be aware of it; although, when asked to testify on his own

behalf, he answered truthfully and directly the questions put to him by his *avocat,* who was careful never to make any inquiry of him that might lead to an honest, but from the *avocat's* point of view, a devastating reply. And neither the judge nor the *procureur de la Republique* intervened with any cross-examination that might have produced such awkward admissions as the fact that the murdered man was weak with terror, had done his best to escape, and had most certainly not struck the first blow. From the public's point of view the trial was not an interesting one.

On the evening of the second day John walked out of the court a free man—so far as the French law was concerned—and the Mallorys took him back to London that night; to their own house in Queen's Gate.

The next question was what was to be done with him.

He had had a letter from Aunt Minnie, who had seen the terrible news in the American papers, inviting him to pay, at last, his long deferred visit to Boston; but he wrote and refused that. "I should be an object of interest," he explained to the Mallorys. "Probably nothing would be said, but I should know what they were all thinking about. I should feel them looking at me."

It was Jane who produced the proposal that she should find him a house in the country, some quiet place, Cornwall, for instance, where he would know no one—he could even change his name if he liked—and go to live there with herself to manage everything for him; and the two children could come to them for the holidays.

John took twenty-four hours to think that over, before he accepted the plan with certain stipulations. In the first place he would not go to Cornwall, it was too like Brittany. There were some quiet little places in the home counties, where he would probably be free from gossip and intrusion. In the second place, he could not bear, as yet, to see Bobby—the little Jane, perhaps. It had been impossible to keep the children in ignorance of what had happened. That possibility had been overlooked until it was too late, and Bobby had had the news from one of his school-fellows at Westminster, and had afterward told his sister. In the third place, all the furniture in the Kensington Gate house was to be sold; and new furniture bought for the country place, wherever it might be. When a house had been found, some firm could be given instructions to do the whole thing. It did not matter in the least what the furniture was like.

Indeed, it seemed to matter little to John what he did, or where he went, so long as he could be free from the intrusions of the outer world.

At the age of forty-three he found himself facing a future, it might be of more than thirty years, that held, as it seemed to him then, no possible interest or attraction. And was it not better, he thought, to resign himself to that rather than to risk the dangers of being drawn back into life. There was but one thing that tempted him, the future of his son—the thought of guiding him, watching over him, losing himself in Bobby's career. Yet the prospect of doing that, was of all things the most terrifying to John at this time.

Would he not inevitably fail with Bobby as he had failed with Viva? He had loved her with a single-minded and unselfish intensity of adoration. Always he had loved her. Never once had his devotion to her weakened or suffered any kind of reaction. And he had not held her love for himself; had not been able to keep her from the temptations of ennui; and had, at the last, when he of all people should have been able to help, woefully misunderstood and failed her. What hope was there that he would not, in turn, misunderstand and misguidedly influence Bobby who was so like his mother; possibly be led again into some crime of passionate violence that might be responsible for Bobby's ultimate perdition and his own?

For John had lost, now, the one article of faith that had remained with him. He had believed that what he had once thought of as the "Guardians of his Fate" had been inspired by a supreme care for his welfare, although their immediate purpose was often hidden from him. He had believed that when they had filled him with a sudden purpose, with an immense urgency to act in utter disregard not only of the conventions of society, but also of his natural inclination, they had compelled him for beneficent and fruitful ends; working with a foresight denied to the human mind. And that faith had, he believed, been proved to be horribly false. It had been no guardian angel that had thrust him forward in those moments of heedless intensity, but some malicious, destructive demon from the darkness of the pit. When he had burned the portrait, and turned Cheney out of the house in Queen's Gate, it had seemed

for a time as if he had been strangely influenced for his ultimate good. But now, John saw those earlier incidents only as the preliminary steps in his temptation, that training in evil, which was to prepare for an appalling crisis fatal to the lives of two people and to his own happiness.

Surely, surely, it would be better, John thought, that Bobby should never again be brought within the influence of one so haunted by evil, so irresponsibly passionate as himself.

Once only in these days, before Jane had found a really charming house in North Buckinghamshire, did John awake to a faint interest in the affairs of this world, and suffer a strange glimmering of hope that, in spite of all, he might, somehow, be wonderfully wrong in losing all faith in the righteousness of the powers that had brought him to the dust.

"The furniture is going to be sold to-day," Jane said to him one morning in September. "Is there absolutely nothing whatever that you'd like to keep?"

And, in a flash, the memory of the tapestry came back to him. The last time he had thought of it had been in the train as he was going to Marseilles to identify his father's body. After that, all recollection of it had faded from his mind, and when he had returned home he had never instituted that search he had determined to make.

"There is just one thing," he said. "But I don't even know if it's there. I never saw it again after we moved to Acacia Road. It's an unfinished tapestry on a frame. The frame's all taken to pieces, of course, and

the tapestry itself rolled up and wrapped in a sheet, and paper over that to keep out the moth. But . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. It's there," Jane said, responding eagerly to the new interest in his voice. "I saw it in the auctioneer's catalogue. And you want to keep that?"

"Yes, I want to keep that," John replied, adding with a sigh, "Perhaps when we get down to the peace and quiet of the country, I might be inspired to finish it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE TAPESTRY—III

JOHN had always been trustworthy in regard to the practical details of life, and he had not scamped the wrapping of the tapestry undertaken all those uncountable years earlier in Torrington Square, when he had first become engaged to Viva. But although the tapestry itself was sound and fresh, with never a sign on it anywhere of the destructive moth, the frame had almost perished. Even when John had first known it, and been tempted by its fascinating screws, the stretcher had had its weaknesses. Now the worms and dry-rot had done their work upon it. The rollers, the screws and the pedestal were honeycombed with innumerable tiny holes that excreted a thin trickle of fine brown dust when the piece was shaken; and the wood that remained was delicate and friable. John could pick bits out with his nail and crumble them between his finger and thumb.

He had taken the parcel up to the room on the first floor that had been designed by Jane for his "study." Most of his books were there and his pedestal writing-desk. Also his drawing-board, mathematical instruments, and other tools of his profession that she had asked Peterson to send. She had not followed John's

suggestion that the business of furnishing should be entrusted to the entire discretion of some casually chosen firm in the Tottenham Court Road, but had undertaken the task herself with immense enthusiasm. She had had two objects very clearly before her: to produce the effect of a bright cheerful house, and to avoid as far as possible any resemblance to the old house in Kensington Gate. This second object had not been very difficult. In Kensington Gate there had been a great many pieces of more or less antique furniture. In the new house there was no piece older than the twentieth century. And the "study," with its two windows overlooking the garden, its open invitation to the sun, and its air of being at once a place to work or rest in, would, she fondly hoped, presently tempt John to find relief in some form of occupation.

But when he had unrolled the tapestry, he was overcome by a feeling of strong distaste for the work with which he had proposed to occupy himself. The sense of duty remained, the same queer sense that had come upon him in the old days in Bloomsbury, but some other element essential for the undertaking of that long slow task was lacking. He recognized it almost at once. He had lost hope. Formerly this work had been a piece of self-discipline, apart from his own life and ambitions. Now, it had become an end in itself. And if all that remained to him was the necessity to complete this tedious piece of useless ornament, was it worth while to attempt it?

He unrolled and spread out the paper pattern, weighting its corners with books as Aunt Caroline had

done when she first showed it to him. That, too, had escaped decay. It had been designed and printed before the days of wood-pulp paper, and the substance of it was as sound and flexible as it had been sixty or seventy years earlier.

How much more was there to do, John reflected? Perhaps a tenth of the whole. A few more clouds, the intimation of the heavenly hosts, the figure of God above all, and then the border that framed the whole subject; the full width of the border along the top and a few inches down each side. A year's work? Eighteen months? How many hours a day would he be able to spend on it? But for the present he could do nothing. He must first buy a new stretcher; and wool, three, four, five shades of yellow; and some very pure white. His needle, with a tail of blue wool, was still there, precisely as he had left it more than sixteen years before, unspotted by a single speck of rust. He believed that it was the same needle that had been used by Aunt Lizzie.

Before he rerolled and rewrapped the tapestry, he measured it carefully in order that, if the spirit moved him, he might be able to buy another stretcher.

For a few days he took no further steps in that direction, but the thought of the tapestry was rarely absent from his mind. It seemed to him now and again, when he was on one of his long lonely walks among the beech woods, that however distasteful might be the contemplation of that tedious work, with no shred of hope to encourage him, he could never know hope again while the work was left unfinished.

And one afternoon in October it came to him that his feeling of distaste was only that which any man might have for a necessary penance. Whatever responsibility might rest with the power, angel or devil, that had irresistibly thrust him forward at that terrible moment of crisis, he could never forget that he had killed a man, and been instrumental in the death of Viva. He was a murderer, marked with the brand of Cain; and it was for him to accept any punishment that might offer, to go out into any wilderness, however displeasing it might be.

He had come to the crest of a hill, to a spot at which the beech woods broke off to a hard edge; and before him a long grass valley dipped and rose again to the slope of other hills crowned by other beech woods, burning with the fires of late autumn. There had been a spell of three fine days with frosty nights that had set a torch to the greens of the foliage, and the crimson sun sinking in a tawny orange sky promised yet another day or two of fine weather to come.

And as John stood there, fresh from his resolve to undertake any penance that might present itself, conscious also of something that approached a feeling of consolation in the glory of the sky and the gorgeous coloring of the beech woods across the valley, he was aware within himself of a faint stir of life that was not a stir of hope so much as of confidence, as if he were on the verge of discovery; although a discovery of what he knew no more than he had known of the meaning of the great allegory he had remotely, childishly, pondered nearly fifty years ago.

"I'm going up to town, to-morrow," he announced to Jane on his return. "There are some things I want to get."

"To town?" Jane echoed on a note of pleased surprise. "Would you like me to come with you?"

He nodded, paused a moment, and then said with an evident effort. "I'm going to finish that old tapestry; and I must buy a new stretcher for it, and some wools."

"The old tapestry," Jane repeated softly. "I've never seen it, you know."

"I'll show it to you when it's finished," John said.

He began it in the spirit of one prepared to fulfill a penance, surrendering himself and all thought of his own pleasure, willing, almost hoping, to suffer. But before a week had passed, he was looking forward to those quiet hours spent over the tapestry as to the one means of escape from the wreck of his life.

Nevertheless, after the first few days, he did not work for more than a couple of hours every morning. During that time he was content to forget, but if he went on after that sense of contentment left him; he began to suffer. In the beginning he believed that this suffering was the penance he had been called upon to pay, and continued to work with increasing discomfort. Afterward, believing himself to be guided, he worked only when he could work in comfort; surrendering himself no longer to a penance but to faith in some power that was ever drawing nearer to him.

All his thoughts while he bent over the tapestry were devoted to his past life. It seemed as if while he worked

he achieved an almost complete separation of himself. One side of him attended scrupulously, accurately, to the matching of colors, the counting and making of the stitches; the other was plunged into a dream wherein he was able to recover the whole of his past life.

The succession of it unrolled before him, objectively, beginning with his earliest years, so that he was able to recover scenes never remembered before, but now as clear and vivid as any of the outstanding incidents that he had always been able to recall at will. Sometimes he witnessed whole days of his childhood, which passed before him in a swift development that permitted him to comprehend all its hours in a few minutes. At other times the pace diminished and he seemed to dwell interminably on a single event.

Yet so far as he could determine there was no purpose in this reflective vision of his past. No bygone action of his, no emotion, appeared to have any special value, to be distinguished in any way from the pattern of the whole. He witnessed his past life as the presentation of an inevitable record, without regret for his failings or joy in his triumphs. All his sensations were those of contentment in his escape from the present, and intense interest.

The two children came home for the Christmas holidays, and for five weeks the tapestry remained tightly rolled and wrapped away in the corner of John's study. He did not know why, but he could not work upon it while his children were there.

He had acceded without hesitation to Jane's sugges-

tion that he should see them again. Whether it would be a penance for him or a pleasure, he was willing now to face his son and daughter, although he had a foreboding that their lives would never again be very nearly entwined with his own; that between himself and Bobby, at least, there would be no hope of regaining the old relations of father and son.

And if their association in the course of those five weeks was, on the whole, easier than he had anticipated, he realized that his foreboding had been justified. Bobby was not so much shy in his father's presence as polite, deliberately polite with an effect of quietness that recalled an odd suggestion of Viva's "goodness." He was attentive, quick to reply when John spoke to him, but always with the manner of one who had set himself a duty and intended strictly to fulfill it.

At those times when the boy was released from his duty, and could be seen romping in the garden or heard shouting about the house for his aunt or his sister, John knew very surely that he was accepted as an unavoidable condition of Bobby's life; as a father who was unlike other fathers, a person to be obeyed and deferred to but never loved, hardly in some sense to be respected.

Even then Bobby—he was fifteen that New Year's Eve—had shown very plainly that he was going to be an artist, and that he was not, moreover, going to follow in the steps of his grandfather. He could draw, but he had imagination. He was not content to produce a correctly photographic outline of any subject he set him-

self to present; he wanted, as he himself used to say, "to place it."

"But it isn't a bit like it," John heard the grave, musical, rather mathematically-minded Jane protest, when her brother showed her his drawing of a tree in the garden.

"Oh! that's only because you can't see it properly," Bobby said. "You've got no eyes."

And the little Jane could not even retaliate by telling her brother that he had no ear, for he had that gift as well; and although he hardly knew his notes, could play anything on the piano after he had heard it two or three times.

Toward the end of the holidays, he discovered his father's drawing-board and mathematical instruments in the "study," begged the use of them, and produced some quite astonishing designs.

With little Jane her father almost succeeded in bridging the gulf of separation. She had evidently attached comparatively little weight to what he had done, and he guessed that she would have questioned him about the Paris tragedy, if he had given her the least encouragement. That, however, he could not do. Certainly not yet. But he decided, with the approval of both Janes, that after the next term she should leave her boarding-school for a time; and continue her education at home with the help of a really competent governess that they hoped to get for her—a German of fifty, an able musician and well-read, of whom the elder Jane had heard. If she were obtainable, she would serve also as a kind of chaperon for Jane herself. Even in that

remote depth of the Chiltern Hills, it was impossible to avoid the suspicion of scandal. The rector's wife had called, and had evinced a polite surprise at the constitution of the household.

When John first took up again his work on the tapestry at the end of January, he feared that the faculty of dreaming his past life had left him; but it returned after a couple of days, his visions restarting at the period he had reached when he had temporarily abandoned the work five weeks before—his first days at St. Paul's.

He believed then that this power of reinvoking the past was his to exercise at his own discretion. There was no magic in the tapestry itself. It chanced to be associated with one or two periods of his life, but its chief value as a talisman lay in the fact that it provided him with mechanical work that occupied certain of his faculties and left some ruminative subconscious self within him free to come to the surface. Probably, he thought, when the tapestry is finished, I shall be able to find some other occupation that will produce the same effect.

Jane found him less preoccupied, less melancholy that spring; and began to hope that before long he might be persuaded to take up his profession again. But when Peterson, who was still carrying on the firm, came down to stay with them for a week-end, and tried to interest John by talking of the work in hand, he shook his head. "Not yet," he said gravely. "Not yet, Peterson."

He gave the same reply to the little Jane in the Eas-

ter holidays when she begged him to whistle again for her.

But no one, not even the woman who had so long and so perfectly loved him, guessed that the definitely visualized period to which he had deferred all contemplation of reentering the world, coincided with the completion of the tapestry. He believed that some impulse, some guidance, would come to him then, although he was not tempted to speculate as to what form the impulse might take.

And all through that year, deliberately and without stress on particular events, the record of his life unrolled in his thoughts. And he knew, now, that in some boyish shy way he had been in love with Viva when she was a little child of ten, before he had gone away to Nice. Later, he witnessed again the destruction of her portrait, without a shiver of regret or self-reproach; with, indeed, precisely the same calm absorbed interest with which he recalled a conversation between himself and Soutar at the old office in Great James Street, or the meeting with the Frenchman in Bloomsbury, or his work on the same tapestry in Torrington Square; the rediscovery of Viva at the Royal Academy; the expulsion of Cheney from the house in Queen's Gate; his engagement to Viva; his marriage; the birth of the children; the finding of his father in the Luxembourg Gardens; the sight of him in the Marseilles Morgue; the calm years of happiness and success.

It was spring again, then, and there came another pause for Bobby's Easter holidays. He could work now, while Bobby was in the house, but that April there was

another reason for a temporary suspension of his task. The hosts of heaven, the figure of God, and all the background were completed. Nothing remained to do but the border. And he had reached that point in his life when he must witness from his new point of view the tragedies of the Paris hotel. And not only did he feel a strong distaste to seeing that vision while Bobby was there, but also, he was conscious of approaching a climax that he anticipated with a slight sense of dread. He could not but believe that when he came to the supreme crisis that had so completely wrecked his life, something tremendous must happen—a revelation, perhaps, an indication of what he must do in the future in order to make atonement. He looked forward to the few days that would see the end of the tapestry with a new uneasiness. Sometimes, in the course of that Easter holiday, he wondered if he would die, strangely, unexpectedly, when he had put in the last stitch. When that thought came, he believed that his single regret would be his inability, however distantly, to watch his son's career.

It seemed to him that spring that Bobby was settling down. He certainly took his painting very seriously. No opposition had been offered to his studying art when he left Westminster.

But when John came to putting on the border of the tapestry, and to his vision of the murder of Basil Cheney, his life in the French prison, his reception of the news of Viva's suicide the scenes still passed before him with the same tranquillity, stirring his mind and emotions no more than had the most trivial incident of

his boyhood. Nor was he immediately conscious of any difference in himself, when, with a faint reluctance, he had put in the last stitch, neatly tucked in the end of the wool at the back of the canvas, and laid the needle down on the table.

He had worked later than usual that morning, and the bell was ringing for lunch.

It was while he was washing his hands in the bathroom that he became aware of a new peace and serenity within himself; of a sense of freedom and release, as if he were wonderfully at some new beginning, cleansed and strengthened. It came to him suddenly, with a strange effect of inspiration, that all this, the tapestry, the whole of his past, was something that had had to be finished before his life began.

Jane seemed to know that something had happened even before she saw him. She was standing at the dining-room door, waiting for him.

"What is it, John?" she asked quickly as he came across the hall.

He smiled, the new smile of peace and certainty that was to stay with him for the rest of his life. "I hardly know yet," he said. "But I think I shall know before very long. Perhaps this afternoon. I've finished the tapestry, Jane. I should like to show it to you, after lunch."

"Oh! yes," she agreed eagerly; but she was puzzled. It seemed as if, for the first time, she could not understand him.

As usual, he spoke little in the course of the meal; but Fräulein Villinger and the little Jane both noticed

some difference in him. They made no comment upon it, but every now and again they looked at him with a new curiosity.

When he and Jane were alone, he asked her to wait for half an hour before she came up to the study. "I've got to prepare for you," he explained.

What he had to do was to untack the completed tapestry from the rollers and hang it on the wall opposite the large window. He had not yet seen the work, as a whole, himself; but when he had hung it upon the wall, he did not pause to examine it before calling Jane.

She came at once. She must have been waiting in her own bedroom with the door open. And her first glance was at John.

"My dear, you look so peaceful," she said. "Have you . . ."

"I know. I feel—rested," he replied. "I don't know why, yet—but I think I shall before long. But I want you to see the tapestry."

She turned then and looked at it, displayed in full light on the wall.

"Oh! John! But how beautiful!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea that it was like that."

"Beautiful?" He shook his head. "Hardly that."

He was studying it now for the first time, and he saw it no longer as a succession of a million stitches patiently added one after another; nor as a diversity of subjects collected upon one canvas; from the crouching hare in the foreground to the vision of God at the zenith—but as a whole, complete and indivisible; a composition in which every figure, every shade of color,

every smallest detail was essential to the integrity of the scheme.

And in the same moment he saw also the whole of his own past life with the same completeness, not as a succession of events, but as a single and indivisible composition; in which his boyish jealously of his mother's cat had precisely the same value and meaning as his murder of Basil Cheney; in which no act, nor thought, nor emotion of his was of any greater or less importance than any other.

"What does it mean, exactly?" Jane was asking. "What is the subject?"

"The subject is Joshua commanding the sun to stand still," John said; "and it means . . ."

He paused there for a moment, with a faint surprise at the realization of his own knowledge. Since when had he known what the tapestry really meant?

"It's an allegory," he continued, and hesitated again, this time because he found that he had no language for the knowledge that had come to him.

"Do you mean that the story of Joshua is an allegory?" Jane asked. "I've often wondered? One knew that the sun could not really have stood still, because that would have meant that the earth had stopped turning round."

John shook his head. "Not necessarily, you know," he said. "It depends, too, upon how quickly one lives. If one were able to live ten times as quickly, the sun and clocks and everything would appear to be going ten times as slowly. But it isn't that that matters. It makes no difference whether the thing actually happened or

not. The point is, though I don't know how to explain it, that when something comes to you, as it has to me to-day, you see that all these extraordinary differences of values we put upon things, don't exist outside—outside our own opinions of them. It seems to us a miracle that a man should make the sun stand still. So it is; but it's just as great a miracle for a man to lift his arm in order to do it. It's the will to do these things that is the real mystery, not the things themselves. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes. I think so," Jane replied. If he could see things like that, it would be so much better for him, and there couldn't be any harm in it. "Did you say this only came to you to-day, John?"

"After I had finished the tapestry," he said. I've seen, for instance, that all the things I've done up to now were of the same kind; that none of them was more or less important than any other, just as no one of the stitches in that tapestry is more or less important than any other."

"And now?" Jane asked, still puzzled.

"Now, I've realized the—the oneness of everything," he replied; "I can't be ashamed or proud any more of anything I've ever done."

"Does that mean you'll take up your old work again?" Jane inquired hopefully. The return to normal life appeared to her as the one sure road to sanity.

"Oh! no!" John said. "Not that. I don't know yet what I shall do, but I shall know presently."

And Jane knew that never before, not even when he was married to Viva, had she lost him more surely than

now. Her place in his life had been in some corner of the tapestry that he had finished with forever that day.

"What shall we do with it now?" she asked, pointing to Joshua.

"Whatever you like," he told her.

This is the story of the tapestry, and not of John's mystical life after that work was finished. But men who met him as an ambulance-driver in France have said that to be with John Fortescue for half an hour gave them new faith and new courage, made them feel as if there must, after all, be some meaning, some ulterior purpose, in all the brutality, the clamor and the filth of war.

The mystical gift came to him as it comes so rarely, complete and without any apparent preparation. But it may well be that all his early life had been designed and ordered for this end. We have not yet learned to read the meaning of these tapestries, which seem to us so often crude and ill-conceived.

THE END

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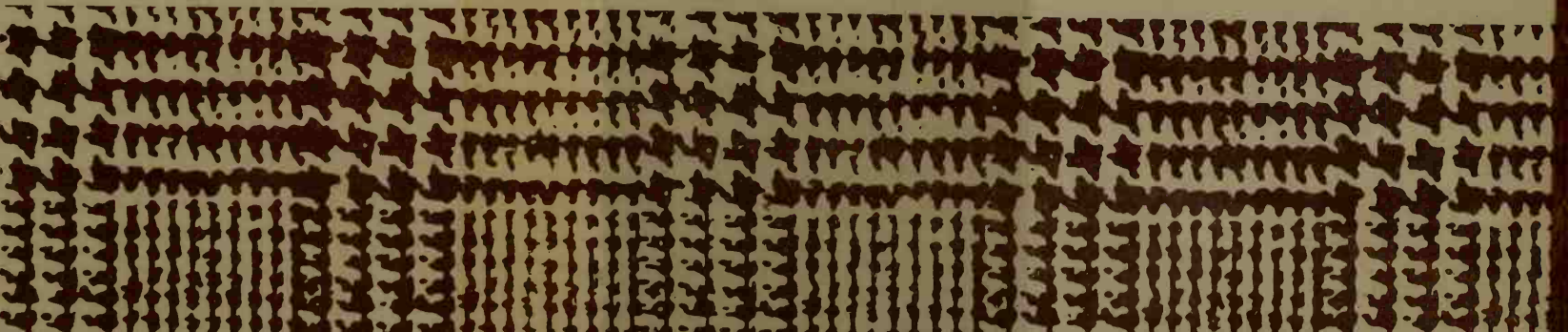

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